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HE CLOSED HIS EXTRAORDINARY PROGRAMME WITH A FLOURISH, LOOKING AT SLIM JIMMY, OVER HIS LEFT SHOULDER, IN A COMICAL BUT INQUIRING WAY.

OR,
ALL WOOL, AND A YARD WIDE.

BY WM. R. EYSTER,
AUTHOR OF "SNAPSHOT SAM," "THE PIPER DE-
TECTIVE," "ROYAL GEORGE," "THREE
HANDSOME SHARPS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TOMMY TOUGH INTRUDES.

THE stage stopped for dinner at Red Bend; and as the vehicle had suffered some damage which it seemed best to repair, the halt was longer than usual. The passengers, however, were considerate, and took the delay better than the average batch of travelers. They had had a long and rather rough ride, and were really honest enough to admit that it was something of a relief, and more than half pleasant, to be lounging around the station at the Bend.

The coach had a full cargo, and there was quite a little party resting in the deliciously cool shade of the porch. The few natives who happened to be about were interested to know something concerning the lot, and Honest John, who was acquainted with the whole camp, from the fact of his having laid off there once for a fort-

night, heard and answered volley after volley of questions, until the boys were at last convinced that he didn't know much more than they did.

In the first place, there was "Governor" Shaw, the leading citizen of Bad Man's Bar.

At that thriving burg he was positively the first person in the estimation of everybody that amounted to anything—which goes to show what an important person he really was.

The governor was a fine-looking man, of say forty, dressed in what might be well called the height of fashion—broadcloth coat, doeskin pants, well fitting boots, and a high silk hat.

In spite of the contrast between him and the natives he did not look so much out of place; and you can safely invest your coin on the statement that no one made any remarks about his costume. That had been tried long ago, at the Bar; and the result was so very unsatisfactory to all concerned save the gentleman himself that the mistake was not likely to be made again where he was known. Somewhere under the broadcloth were hidden certain deadly weapons, and when the governor did use them they were productive of the sudden collapse of somebody.

Not that he was anything of a desperado, or a self-appointed chief; but he was utterly fearless and thoroughly skillful, besides having plenty of gold, and any quantity of adherents.

As he had no occasion to take his own part of late years, he had sometimes taken the part of others, when the exigency seemed to call for it; and right here in Red Bend he had shot down one of the biggest ruffians that had ever died with his boots on, for using language that might be construed as insulting, to a young lady, who had subsequently gone to Bad Man's Bar, where she was usually known as Fairy Fan.

Tall, keen-eyed, and rather a pleasant smile under his heavy mustache Egbert Shaw was a popular man, at home and abroad.

He was standing on the porch, awaiting the completion of the repairs to the stage, and smoking a cigar in a leisurely way that betokened enjoyment; while through the window two persons were watching him—two persons who had been traveling with him all day, who had spoken to him more than once, and now seemed to be looking at him with more than ordinary interest.

"I think, father, that we can afford to trust him. I have made some inquiries and find that he is the best known man in all this region, and every one appears to have a good word to say for him. Surely, if there is any one that can help us, he is the man."

The speaker was the younger of the two. On the way-bill she was set down as Miss Darelle. When the other addressed her it was usually as, "my daughter," though now and then he said, "Leona." As to a description,—she was young, beautiful, fair-faced, rather timid in her manner, and looked up to her elder with an appealing glance as she spoke.

Perhaps, on that account, Miss Leona looked younger than she really was; and in the same way it was possible that the other looked older. He was a little, frail man, with a white, well-wrinkled face, and a cough. Now and then his hands shook after a manner painfully suggestive of the palsy, and his voice was thin and his speech hesitating.

"I don't know—ough! I don't know. Why will you speak to strangers? What can they care for our sorrows? Ough! Wait till I have tested them, Leona, wait till I have tested them."

His deep-set eyes glistened a little as he spoke, and were fixed on "the governor," who, at that moment, turned his face so that they gained a good view of its profile.

"I am not sure that I understand you, father. But, this I do know: we are going to Bad Man's Bar, and from what they tell us of the place it does not belie its name. What can we, perfect strangers, do there? Who knows what trouble you may be in? Would it not be well to make friends with him on the way? He has a face I can trust, and as we must trust strangers, why not begin with him?"

The old man did not answer at once. If any one else had been watching him, he might have noted, even if Leona did not, the suspicious look he cast upon her, and overheard the low mumble of one talking to himself. It was only after some moments that he raised his voice, though even then only to a husky whisper.

"You care for him, you care for him! How dare you? For a man that you never saw before you are willing to sell your old father with all his secrets. Beware! I am your only stay in life. If you ruin me you ruin yourself."

"You think of money only. Have you no confidence at all in human nature?"

"Not much—ough! If you have no money—nothing to lose—it's well enough. Any other way—ough!—you are sure to be disappointed. I had confidence once and this—ough!—is the end of it."

He held up his thin, shriveled, shaking old hands, and coughed dismally.

"But it might be worse. You have a million yet; and you have me—Well, sir, what do you want?"

She turned suddenly, and spoke with a sharp, quick tone, so different that it scarcely seemed

to be her own. The transformation showed how little it took to startle her; and, probably, how much reason they had for keeping their affairs from the outside world.

The intruder halted short on the threshold, and seemed too much startled or abashed to move.

He really had as much right there as did the two who for some time had been the sole occupants of the room; but he evidently did not think of that, as he stood staring at Leona, his mouth and eyes wide open. Altogether he cut such a ridiculous figure that the young lady first gave a short laugh, and then was silent through shame for herself.

He was a tall, lantern-jawed young man, of perhaps twenty-two, with a sallow countenance and a face preternaturally long, the oddity of its appearance being heightened by the long tow locks that hung down behind his ears, and the pointed little goatee that was elevated now at an angle of about forty-five degrees, as he threw his head back.

Finally, as he did not speak, Leona felt compelled to.

"Well, sir, haven't you seen enough, or must I tell you that this is a family party, and your presence here an intrusion? Is there anything that you want?"

"Nary thing, leetle angel. I'm jest a perspectin' 'round fur ther driver, thinkin' ef I c'u'd strike him, an' stroke him jest ther right way I mou't go on with therhearse. It's nashun full, they're sayin'; but mebbe Jimmy kin stick me in sumwhar. I want ter git ter ther Bar, an' I'm goin' ter git thar ef I hev ter walk. Be you a-goin' that way?"

When he once got started he was too modest to stop, and it was doubtful if the question was really intended to bring an answer.

Leona might have known that from his manner, but she had a retort more sharp than courteous on her tongue, when the old man, who had been staring eagerly at the stranger, took up the conversation.

"Yes, yes—ough! We are on our way to the Bar, and would be glad to have you go with us. They tell me that it is a dangerous road. Do you know anything about it?"

"Gosh!"

"You do then?"—taking the monosyllable as an answer. "It is dangerous—the robbers are abroad? Too bad, too bad! What will become of us? I oughtn't to have brought the gold along. Come in, come in! The stage won't start for an hour yet, and the time can't be filled in more pleasantly than right here. Ough! I'm an old man, and I want something to amuse me."

He drew from his pocket a pack of cards and held them up. No trouble to tell what sort of amusement he was hankering after. When the battered-looking old deck came into view there was an accompanying gleam in his eye, and a sudden change in the lines about his mouth that made the latter almost wolfish.

The straggling looking young man hesitated with his response, and Leona sprang between them.

"Hold! Can you not see that he is wild—demented. Attempt at your peril to take advantage of him. I am here as his guardian angel, and woe to the one that attempts to harm him. Begone! When the fit has left him he will not know which to despise most—himself, or the man he crazily imagines he can make his victim!"

As she spoke she moved forward, her hands outstretched, her eyes flashing, her frame quivering with the strong emotions that the scene had awakened. One could almost imagine that she thought that she was taking her life in her hand as she swept toward the young stranger.

"Excuse me, miss, but I ain't one ov them kind. I can't play keards fur a cent, an' I know it, an' ain't tryin' it. So, ef ther old man hes a noshun fur that kind ov fun, I wouldn't be a bad sorter side pardner ter wring in on him. But I hain't got no coin ter lose, er I wouldn't be tryin' ter git a free ride over ter Bad Man's Bar, and so I'm a good deal more anx'us ter keep out er his road than mebbe you think; an' ef it's all ther same I'll jest crawl back ter ther outside an' leave yer ter reason ther fit off. In these hyer regions yer can't watch him too clost, fur ef some ov ther boys gits a whack at him with ther pasteboards they won't leave a grease-spot left ov his mil liun—an' afore they got through they might scoop in you, too. So long! I'm Tommy Tough, ov Red Bend, an' I ain't sure but what I'll see yer later."

Without giving her a chance for apology or answer the intruder withdrew, leaving Leona to look at her father with strange eagerness. Experience had told her that when she interfered in such cases he was apt to make the bitter fight in private that he did not seem to dare to in public.

He answered her look with one to the full as earnest as her own. Then, instead of the outbreak that she anticipated, he spoke in his most husky whisper:

"Ah, why did I bring you? Cannot you see that it is with such as he that I must make myself sure of my system? He might have been worth millions to me while I was searching for the

poor boy. Yes, millions—and you have thrown them all away. They robbed me of them before, and now—ough! Are you in league with them. If you are I will kill you, if you are my own daughter. I will kill you."

Then he got up and walked back and forth across the room for several turns, with his hands tightly clasped over his face, while his feeble frame was racked in the effort he made to abstain from tears.

Anxiously did Leona watch him, while he hurried up and down with an ever-increasing rapidity in his gait, until suddenly he dropped limply into a heap by the side of a chair, and half-knelt, half lay there, his head resting on his arms, and his breath coming in great gasps, that were audible across the room—and even beyond.

At that Leona hesitated no longer, but threw her arms around him as she settled at his side.

"Forgive me! forgive me! It is vile; it is heartless for me to interfere; but you and I are seeing with different eyes, and in my view I dared not do differently. Pardon me; hereafter I will suffer in silence, and only watch that you are not robbed, as in the past you know that you have been."

If it was only disappointment that had so powerfully affected him, certainly the old man felt such disappointments more deeply than the average of mankind. It began to look as though it was more than sorrow—it might be death.

So Leona at last felt, and looking up in confused alarm found that Governor Shaw was looking in at them through a window, a world of heartfelt sympathy expressed in his face.

CHAPTER II.

ORPHEUS COMES ALSO.

THAT look on the face drew the attention of Leona more critically, since it told her that there was far more sympathy awarded her than the circumstances of the case, as they appeared on the surface, would seem to warrant. What if the old man had been tried beyond what his feeble constitution could stand? With another and a louder cry she caught her father's head in her hands, and strove to raise it from its semi-concealment between his arms.

The gasps came slower now, and she even thought that there was the beginning of the ominous death-rattle in his throat. For the moment she believed that he was dying.

The governor did not hesitate longer, when he heard the low cry that was forced from her lips. He sprang lightly through the window and made his way to her side.

"Do not be unnecessarily alarmed, my dear miss. I fancy that your father has been tried by the journey a little more than either he or you imagined, and that this is simply a momentary reaction. Let me see. Yes. You need feel no alarm—for the present, at least. In a few moments he will be on his feet. Of course, what chronic ailments he may have I know not, but his time is not yet come."

While he was speaking he was forcing the mouth of a small flask between the lips of the almost unconscious man. When a few drops of brandy had been taken with an evident effort, he quietly awaited the result; while Leona watched both with an anxious and a troubled gaze.

"It is over," remarked the governor, in a relieved tone, after he had watched for a few moments longer. "He is recovering. There must have been some reason for his wild excitement—I could not help but notice it, as I stood near the window. What was it? I think I saw some one else in the room. Has any one offered any insult to you? If so, you may be sure that it shall not be repeated. If your father is unable to protect himself, or you, there are others who are."

"No, no!" answered Leona, hastily. "There has been nothing said or done that we could take offence at. True, there was a young man found his way hither, and his coming had something to do with the attack, but he was perfectly respectful, and had no idea that in any way he could be working us harm. The truth is, we should never have ventured here in the present state of father's health; and it was only a terrible necessity that drove us to the journey; that, thank Heaven, is nearly at an end."

"And the object—no, I do not mean to be obtrusive, but if in any way I can be of assistance, command me."

There was no evidence of curiosity on the part of Egbert Shaw—only an earnest desire to be of service if in any way the pair might need his help—but it was an opportunity that the girl more than half desired. She opened her mouth impulsively—and then, remembering the conversation with her father, just previous to the intrusion, she remained silent.

To a keen observer, such as Egbert Shaw, there could be no question of her intention, yet he did not attempt to encourage her, though he could see that but little was needed to make her speak.

"Be in no haste," he said, quietly, as he saw that she still hesitated. "I can well imagine that there is something that you would fain confide to some one, but for your own sake I

would advise you to be well asured that you have found the right person before you speak. It may be that there are reasons why the objects which bring you here should remain unknown to the outside world, and which your father has locked in his breast. I would advise that you counsel with him before you make any explanations to any one—even to me. Then, if he admits that he needs a friend or a protector, send him to me. I am tolerably well known in these regions, and 'most any one can tell you whether it is worth your while to have Egbert Shaw on your side."

"A thousand thanks! You give me new hope. It was only a moment ago that I was speaking to him on the very subject. The intrusion of that young man interrupted the discussion, or perhaps by this time he would have taken you into his confidence. I feel wonderfully like telling you the truth, so far as I know it, but your words have shown me my duty. For the present I will say no more, but if you do not change your mind it may not be long until I try the strength of your promises. Where, at the Bar, will we find you?"

"Where will you not? I am identified with the town, and my name is known to every citizen. Ask for me, and you will find me; send for me at any hour of day or night, and neither will your messenger fail to find me, nor will I fail to come. I wish that I could be with you for the remainder of your journey, but I find it most likely that I will be delayed here for some hours, and perhaps until to-morrow. It is not likely, however, that you will be molested upon the road—if you are bent upon going ahead with the stage, which by this time is about ready—and when we meet again you will have had time to consider what we have been saying. Now, your father seems to be almost himself. I must speak to him, and then see to my own affairs."

Perhaps the governor had taken his cue from the manner of Miss Leona. At any rate, neither had been officious with the old gentleman, from the moment that they were both sure that he was coming to himself. They stood by his side and conversed frankly and openly in a tone that they knew he could not help but hear their every word.

No doubt he did, and understandingly, too. He raised his hand feebly, and yet with no hesitation, as Shaw turned toward him.

"Pray accept our thanks. I have heard what my daughter has said, and, impulsive as she is, she has spoken neither too much nor too little, as you will admit when you have heard the truth. But I cannot tell it to you to-day. I have not the strength, nor the time. I must go on, for fear that my little strength may be sapped before I get to my journey's end. Once there I can afford to rest and to speak. I would that I could wait until you can go with us, but I doubt if my strength will fail until my work is accomplished. If it does, heaven help my poor girl!"

For some time he had been speaking with a clear brain, and without the cough that usually punctured his sentences.

At this Leona was not surprised, since she had noticed the same thing before, after attacks of weakness, but she knew that it would not last for long, and she gently warned him by a light touch upon his shoulder.

The warning came too late, for, as the hands of the two men fell apart the elder was seized with a return of his spasmodic complaint.

"Go, now," said Leona, hastily. "I am accustomed to him in these spells, if not in the others. There is no more danger now, and you can be of no more service; and may be of harm. Go, and we shall meet again."

"Au revoir!" answered the governor, with more of the air of a man of the world than he had yet assumed. "Do not forget that I am your friend, and a power at Bad Man's Bar. I hear the coach now. It will start in a few moments. Make up your mind speedily whether your father is fit to continue his journey."

"You little know him or you would be aware that he always makes up his own mind in regard to his movements. Good-by. We will be ready in a moment."

She waved her hand, and smiled, with less of anxiety on her lips than had been seen there since the journey began, the governor took his departure, and in a moment more the stage rattled up to the door.

There was a strange, puzzled look on Egbert Shaw's face as he went out from the interview. A close observer might indeed have suspected that he was wondering whether the two were altogether strangers to him. He shook his head, however, in a doubting way, and though he strode straight away it was evident to the first man he met that he was not altogether in a good humor about something.

That first man happened to be Tommy Tough, who looked up at him with the same innocently earnest gaze that he had turned upon Sidney Darelle and his daughter.

"Hello!" said the governor, twisting abruptly around, to face the young man.

"What were you saying to that party in there? You broke the old man all up. I want you to understand that they are friends of mine, and if the young lady had not spoken a good word for

you I would have been hunting you up with a derringer in my fist before this. You know me, and what that means, don't you?"

Tommy Tough nodded without hesitation.

"Gosh!"

The brief tribute to the reputation of Egbert Shaw was none the less thorough, and that gentleman smiled grimly.

"I should suppose. I am not altogether a stranger to Red Bend, where, I believe, you are counted a resident. I don't ask questions without wanting an answer, and I notice that there are several of mine that 'gosh' don't cover. What did you go into that room for, and what did you say that could break the old man all apart like that?"

"I went in thar lookin' fur Slim Jimmy, an' so I tole 'em; an' thet I war bound fur ther Bar, ef I hed ter go thar a footback. Then ther ole man wanted me ter sit down an' amuse him, playin' keards, which are suthin', I tole him, I couldn't do wuth a cent, an' then I got out, an' I ain't seen nothin' ov Slim Jimmy, which are ter take ther hearse through frum Red Bend, yit."

"So you want to go over to Bad Man's Bar with the stage?"

"That's about ther size ov it."

"Well, my friend, I am sorry to disappoint you; but, you can't go. You understand me? I'll let you know when we want to increase the population of the camp by your presence, and up to that time if you arrive without further instructions you will go out in a store-box within the next five hours. You sabe? Steer clear of the Bar, my gentle Tommy."

"Gosh, yes, ef yer put it in that thar way. I ain't rubbin' ag'in' Eg. Shaw's fur, nohow you kin pile it up. So long! I'll stay right hyar, an' ef yer see Slim Jimmy you kin tell him he needn't wait."

He turned away in haste, and the governor shot after him:

"Mind. They are friends of mine. You scared them once, half out of their wits. If you do it again there will be music in the air, and the notes will fit well for a funeral."

Tommy returned no answer, and the coming up of the stage attracted the attention of every one so thoroughly that he was totally forgotten.

The unexpected detention had helped to make some changes. The driver was not the same, several of the passengers besides Egbert Shaw had dropped out of the cargo, and if Tommy Tough had been in quest of a seat he would have had no difficulty in obtaining one, provided his request was backed by the requisite amount of coin. In fact, the only inside passengers now left were the Darelles, a quiet-looking man clad in the garb of a mirror, and a young gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Wellington Woburn.

The young man had, in an unobtrusive way, attached himself to the party something over a week before, when the staging had first begun, and had stuck to it with an amiable persistence that nothing could shake. It began to look as though it was hardly chance that led him straight along with them, and Sidney Darelle could hardly be blamed when he hinted to Miss Leona that probably her personal attractions had something to do with it.

Not that the young lady showed any sign of feeling complimented by the undeclared attentions of Woburn, or that she would be apt to be interested in a gentleman of his stripe, anyhow; but just now she accepted any little courtesies that he might show her as a matter of course; and yet, in spite of the jealous complaints of the old gentleman, she scarcely knew how he looked. If she had given more than a passing thought to the subject her hurried conclusion was that he was one of the most ridiculous objects she had ever the pleasure of meeting.

Of course there were worse built, uglier-faced-looking, young men in the world but they didn't have the excruciating manner of Wellington Woburn, just from Boston.

The dude is an animal of its own class—but the Boston dude is a class so much by itself thar it becomes almost a distinct species. And of this species the young man, who, as they stated, looked so inanely out of the coach, was undoubtedly near the head of the list.

The insiders arranged themselves without much trouble, the two men on top growled a few words, there was a shout of "all aboard," and the outfit dashed away, an hour or so late, but making good time and likely to reach the Bar long before sunset.

The two Darelles were not inclined to conversation, Wellington Woburn never had an idea that was not suggested by his immediate surroundings, while the fourth passenger was strictly silent in accordance with his previous principles. For that reason the party was by no means a lively one, and its solemnity rather increased as the miles dropped away behind them. Sidney Darelle had long been absorbed in his own thoughts, and Leona in a gentle slumber, when a sound reached their ears that caused the young lady to awaken with a start, while Darelle exclaimed.

"What in the name of wonder is that?"

The four being silent the question was answered for them beyond peradventure.

Above the low rattle and grind of the wheels they could hear the notes of a violin.

"Musith in this goadfawsaken country!" exclaimed Wellington Woburn. "What a dessek-washum! Owah Jehu seems about to—aw—listen to it! Weally!"

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL LONGHAND'S TAX-GATHERERS.

THE announcement of Wellington Woburn was a fact. Slim Jimmy, who had been toiling along in quiet grandeur, without an available soul to whom he cared to speak a word, was at heart willing to welcome any diversion that did not take up too much of his time; and was especially willing to stop for this. He took a steady pull on his horses, and while his inside passengers were at the windows, staring out, the vehicle came to a stop.

Then the musician by the roadside looked over his shoulder and gave a little nod of recognition, though not a word was said until the air came naturally to an end.

A wonderfully good performer was this vagabond Orpheus. Even Wellington Woburn admitted that, with an approving nod, after he had listened a little; forgetting to make an invidious comparison with what he had heard in Boston, as he curiously watched the player.

The man was fat, fair and forty. He was also greasy, unkempt and for the most part ragged. However much he might excel with the violin, it was evident that his abilities had been of but little financial benefit.

Nevertheless, he seemed to take life without complaint, and just as he found it. He closed his extraordinary performance with a flourish, looking at Slim Jimmy, over his left shoulder in a comical but inquiring way.

"Thort I heard yer ole hearse a-comin', an' jest warmed up my j'int a little, a waitin' on yer. Ef I didn't feel good when yer whip crack-ed I want ter know. Yes. That's so."

"Bound fur Bad Men's Bar, beyer? All right. Give us suthin' quick and lively, an' when we git thar you won't be far abind; an' it sha'n't cost yer a cent, neither. Oh, my! Won't they shake light laigs, at Shiffler's lay-out ter night? An' Slim Jimmy'll be all thar! You kin chune her up a leetle, now an' then, ez we go along; but afore we start I want er squar' one, right frum ther ground floor, ez a send-off."

Jimmy had his foot down solid on the brakes, his hands folded and resting over his knee, one hand grasping the bundle of reins, the other his whip, his face all the time twisting backward and forward with an expectant grin. It was a fair guess that he knew the musician of old, if his cargo did not.

The fiddler had an eye to the passengers, however. He winked at the driver, and then squinted at the faces that were looking down at him with some curiosity.

He gave a bow and a scrape, and then flourishing his fiddle-bow in the orthodox, preliminary way, struck into a hoe-down, such as Jimmy had requested, greatly to the delight of the latter, who squirmed and twisted and twitched his feet until it seemed as though he was going to jump down and begin to double-shuffle and pigeon-wing right on the trail.

But in the midst of it the player suddenly changed into "Sounds from Home," and recognizing the tune on the instant, for the first time in years Jimmy was almost homesick. He would have been altogether if he had known of any home to go to. As it was, he had some faintly defined longings for "back East," which died away with the music.

"Now hop up hyer," he exclaimed, rubbing across his eyes the back of his hand. "Dunno w'ot ther company'd say ef they knowed a feller war wastin' his time on sich foolishness; but it makes him feel durned good, you bet."

"In er holy minnit. Must do ther reg'ler thing. Don't want folks ter feel hurt acuse they hain't hed a chainece ter drap a leetle offer-in'. Ef yer ever wants ter contribit' ter ther s'pport ov a destertoot orffin, with er large fambly an' no reg'ler empl'yment, now's yer chainece. Yes. That's o!"

He tucked his fiddle under his arm, took off his battered hat, and shambled up to the side of the stage.

Miss Leona, relieved somewhat of the pressure that had made her unnaturally solemn while thinking over their situation, and while in the face of her father's sudden illness, had almost become another woman under the influence of the sweet sounds. She drew back smiling and turned to the others.

"About how large do you think that this offering should be? He looks like one of these inexhaustible reservoirs that can absorb all the offerings in the world, and show none the better for it."

"Aw! I should suggest the smwallest coin you have, aw. The entertainment was exquithiatingly small."

And at the same time Mr. Woburn tossed a coin that was not certainly less than a quarter-eagle.

"Never mind, Leona, never mind," muttered Darelle, as she drew out her purse. "I will contribute for both."

His contribution dropped by the side of the

dude's, and fairly went it one better—being twice as large!

The fiddler was more than satisfied. He took the two coins out of his hat, looked at them, spun them in the air, caught them deftly, and consigned them to his pocket.

Then he stooped and looked at the springs, inspected the reach-pole, and gave the wheels each a kick, before he turned again to the donors.

"My perfoundest. It's bin years sence I hed ther pleasure ov meetin' ther true frien's ov gen'us, an' I wouldn't hev anythin' happen to 'em, not fur nothin'. No. That's so. Ef iron, wood, harness-leather an' hoss-flesh—all ov which looks ter be sound—kin hold tergether, methinks we kin make ther raffle. But hole tight when we go over ther breakers. We'll kin like a holy hurrikane. Eh, Jimmy?"

As he asked the question he struggled up to a seat by the side of the driver.

"What ner thunder be you drivin' at?" asked Jimmy, as he gathered up his reins, preparatory to sending his team along to make up for lost time.

"Don't be tryin' ary tricks on them insides. They're all good leather, ef they be a leetle fresh; an' they're ther solid fr'en's ov Eg. Shaw, an' yer don't want ter monkey 'round ther folks ez he hez under his wing."

"Nary monkey. I war lookin' ther lay-out over perincipally on ther 'count. Ov course no one 'd think ov goin' fur Unkel Dan'l; but ef you don't find sum one waitin' fur them lam's inside, down 'round ther skeeriest corner ov ther ten-mile cut-off you kin call me a red-hot liar, frum 'way up ther crick. I heard su'thin' ov ther plot, an' I jest laid out ter see ef they war wuth givin' ov ther wink. An' they's wuth it sure. Shell I talk Spanish to 'em, er shell you?"

"Uncle Dan'l, dog rot yer pickters, what's this ye'r givin' ov me? You ain't no man ter run yer preshus skin inter danger; no more be I. Ef yer think, 'cause they shelled out so lively fur a screech er two on yer bazoo, thet I'm goin' ter let yer feed 'em with wind an' charge fur fu'st class boardin', ye'r 'way off, an' heap bad mistook. You kin keep yer mouth shut, er git down offen this hearse."

Jimmy's indignation was real, and he actually thought that it was his duty to protect his passengers, and nip in the bud what he was sure was a scheme for a swindle.

"Oh, I'm no braver than ther law allows, an' when it comes ter fightin' I ain't wuth a cent; but fur lovely wimmen I'll run some reesk. It's ther solid, gospil truth I'm tellin' ov yer. Hope I may die ef Kunnel Longhand an' his gang ain't a-waitin' fur ye. You kin turn back ef yer want's ter, er you kin hustle 'em through so lively thet thar will be a chance fur beatin' ov 'em; but ef I war a bettin' man, which I ain't mostly, fur lack ov funds, I'd say thet it's three ter one ag'in' yer gittin' ter ther Bar ter-night 'bout a spill. That's so. You hear me remark?"

"Then keep yer bloody mouth shet till it's over," gritted Jimmy. "Reckon they won't be rough, seein' thet thar's a feemale aboard; an' thar ain't no use ter git her worked up ahead ov time."

"All right. You're a-runnin' ov ther hearse; toot yer own horn, an' I'll sing small. Ter make ther hours pass happy like I'll tortur' ther ole Cremona, an' you kin clap yer han's till ther boys arrove. Don't think they'll bother me. They never hev' an' I've met 'em slathers ov times."

The cordiality of their relations being in such a strained condition the conclusion of Uncle Daniel was about the best he could have arrived at. With as steady a wrist as the situation would admit of he put his fiddle to his chin, and began to draw out the linked sweetness of which he was the master.

At the first sound the rather desultory conversation that had been going on in the coach ceased altogether. Of course the situation was not one in which the music could be enjoyed to the utmost, but Leona was willing to make the most of it, and the rest, as in duty bound, followed her lead.

Evening was coming on by this time. It was still some four miles to Bad Man's Bar, and two of those miles were really the worst of the road they had to travel that day.

Further back the party had heard some few floating stories about road-agents and a certain Colonel Longhand who occasionally operated in that direction, but so far had not troubled themselves much about them. Like people who have never wandered often from the more law-abiding neighborhoods, they could not realize crime until they actually came in contact with it.

Uncle Daniel was just in the midst of one of his most artistic flourishes, and the coach was swinging through the gloomiest portion of the "Ten-mile Cut-off," when the music ceased, the brake went down, the stage came to a halt, and a coarse voice exclaimed:

"No foolishness now, Jimmy; we've got yer kivered, an' at ther fu'st squirm, down yer go. Han's up, an' fingers empty. Ez fur you, Unkel Dan'l, we know yer gait, an' we won't have ter speak twic't. Keep yer mouth shut, an' han's

still, an' we'll be done with this job in 'bout half er minnit."

It is needless to say that Slim Jimmy had drawn in at the very first appearance of danger. He was hired to drive stage, and he didn't intend to do anything else.

Uncle Daniel continued to grasp the neck of his fiddle with one hand, while with the other he flourished the bow in the most graceful of manners. He made no remarks, but the gesture spoke for him, and said as plain as words, "Thank you, gentlemen. Work your own sweet wills; I won't interfere."

So much for the outside. Within things were different, and not quite so cool. Sidney Darelle gave utterance to about the first curse that Leona had ever heard him use; Wellington Woburn gave a groan, that indicated that it seemed to him that the end of all things had arrived; while Miss Leona said nothing, and with a troubled look of wonder on her face sat watching the comparative stranger in the opposite corner of the stage.

The rapidity with which he thought and acted was enough to surprise any one. He thrust his hand into his breast, threw it around again to his hip, glanced at the three faces of his companions as though he would read them through and through, and then, as the coach came to a halt, he went out of the window feet-first, without a word to any one, and completely and mysteriously disappeared. As, at that spot, and on that side, there was a yawning canyon, it was more than likely he had flung himself over the rocks—whether through fright or with a purpose was not so easy to say.

A better spot for an attack could not have been chosen.

There was a sharp pitch in the road, which was here hung on the mountain-side; and a hundred yards ahead was a short curve, around which the boldest drivers did not care to venture at a pace much faster than a walk. Even if Slim Jimmy had the courage to apply the braid and attempt to dash through, it was almost a dead certainty that he would find himself, coach and cargo, at the bottom of a sheer wall, that was there not less than twenty feet in depth, and, not far away, a full hundred.

Moreover, to make the thing a certainty, as the leader of the band stepped out into view from a little pocket in the face of the rocks that towered up on the right-hand side, two of his men made their appearance at the bend. They acted as sentinels at that point, but at the same time, if the coach by a miracle had passed the rest, they would have been ready for it.

As there was no room to turn the vehicle, there was no need to have a gang in the rear, yet, if the passengers could have looked about a hundred yards up along the declivity down which they had just come, they would have seen a sentinel was posted there. His trap was complete, which was the way that Colonel Longhand generally laid them.

"Now, inside thar, don't give us any nonsense. We mean business from ther word go, but ef yer act squar' an' fair, like ez not some ov you won't be any ther wuss fur ther visit. Throw that door open, an' step down an' out. An' be mighty quick about it. Ther fu'st thing are ter see ef we hev ther right pigs by ther ear. Ef we hev, we'll slit a few ears an' then turn ther hull drove loose, ter go on till ther next town. Are yer comin'?"

The last words were shot out sharply, and it was evident that the outlaws were not inclined to dally over their work; while the dubious threat suggested unpleasant possibilities just ahead.

But no one moved at the order.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE DAN'L RUNS THINGS ACCORDINGLY.

As no one else spoke Uncle Dan'l undertook to break the spell.

"See hyer, don't be p'intin' them guns fur us—it's jest a waste ov good intensions. Ef yer know ez much 'bout Unkel Dan'l ez yer say yer do you know he's got ez much sense ez ther law calls fur. Jest let me run this lay-out in your cent'rests—an' I wouldn't mind addin' 'on sheers,' ef I war sure them below wouldn't hear me. Skereed ez they be they can't open them doors; an' ef Jimmy lets go ov ther ribbons, we'll all go over inter Ten-mile Gulch tergether. Mebbe that's what yer wants, though? Eh! That's so. Didn't think ov that. Save berryin'."

A shrewd chuckle followed this suggestion, which was none too well received.

"Who in blazes told you ter put yer lip in? Is this ther hearse thet war ter hev a man by ther name ov Darelle aboard?"

"How kin I tell? Ef his name are on ther way-bill mebbe it war. S'pose yer let me open ther door an' ax fur him. Don't reckon he kin work ther trick frum ther inside."

"All right. Fire ahead! and ef ye don't keep a sharp look out so will we. Thar's a heap sight ov good time lost a'ready."

Uncle Daniel had taken for granted the consent, and scrambling down approached the door gingerly. He was not exactly certain that he would not receive a volley from front and rear. When they are excited there is no telling

what antics passengers will cut up, though the fiddler was almost certain that he had none of the shooting kind to look after. Yet, who could tell?

"You in thar! Don't be wastin' time, but waltz out lively. Cunnel Longhand ain't one ov ther long-suffering kind, an' ther sooner you crawl inter ther road ther sooner you'll find out what's goin' ter be on the grass."

And then he whispered in so low a tone that it was only a chance that they heard what he was saying:

"Make up yer minds quick. Ef ye'r goin' ter throw up yer hands do it quick. Ef yer wants ter kick an' run ther chances say so. Yer may pull through, er yer may land in kingdom come. Ary way it'll be monst'rus soon over. That's so; yes. But Unkel Dan'l are willin' ter try ther raffle ef you be. Which are it ter be?"

Woburn looked as though he did not catch a word of it. He was crouched in one corner of the stage with his hands over his face in an attitude of terror.

The other two were calmer, and they looked at each other, waiting for a lead.

None knew better than Leona that her father had very strong reasons for not wishing his effects to pass the inspection of the road-agents, while the special inquiry after him had not been made unheard. To take a reasonable chance of success he would, for himself, have been willing to risk any reasonable amount of danger.

But Leona was in the way. It was not very likely that the outlaws would do her any personal injury, beyond emptying her pockets, if there was a prompt surrender; while, if they followed the lead of the strolling fiddler, of whom they knew next to nothing, there would be strong chances of death, and very little of escape. On Leona's account the old gentleman had decided to surrender at discretion.

No doubt all of this was told in his face, as he turned toward her to have one more look before stepping down and out.

She saw the look and understood it. There was no time for explanation. If Uncle Daniel, who had so suddenly come to the front, had any plan or plot, all that could be done was to tell him to try it and accept the consequences.

She leaned forward and caught her father by the shoulder.

"Fight! If we can beat them I say fight! If there is a chance even! You, sir, take every risk, and do your best."

For answer Uncle Daniel flung his fiddle into the coach, and then, with a marvelous, unlooked-for agility, sprung up on the wheel, and from there to the box, uttering a yell and upsetting Slim Jimmy at the same time that he snatched both reins and whip.

"Lie down inside thar!" he shouted, as he brought the silk down, with a sweeping cut.

On the instant the horses sprang away; while Uncle Daniel dropped down behind the foot-board, barely in time to evade the bullets that went whistling over his head.

It was not much of a plan, after all.

The men of Colonel Longhand had been thrown a little off their guard. Knowing pretty nearly what was in the stage, and able to keep a fair watch on what was on it, they had approached carelessly, and with more consideration for the little lady who made part of the cargo than any one was giving them credit for, were doing their work after their mildest manner. When the horses bounded away they were instantly left behind, and with nothing but the rear of the coach to shoot at. The unnamed outsiders had already, at the original order dropped to the ground, and were standing at one side under the revolvers of an appointed guard.

Whether they would shoot at what they saw and run the chance of hitting something beyond, was the question that the fiddler wanted solved. If not, then he had two men in front of him, and the dangerous turn to manage. Once past them and it and there was at least a strong chance in his favor.

Jimmy was so thoroughly paralyzed that neither aid nor opposition was to be expected from him. If he had only had the nerve to manage the horses Uncle Daniel had an idea that he could manage the two road-agents in the way.

But the driver could not, or would not; and the two sentinels, instead of rushing forward at the sound of the melee, suddenly skipped out of sight, so that the musician's hand went from the revolver at his belt, and he devoted all his energies to guiding the team around the ugly curve.

He did that successfully, too, though it was all over in less time than it takes to write it; and then, suddenly, from behind the rocky angle they were rounding, the road-agents fired two shots and sprung straight at the horses' heads.

In answer, there was just one report, and one outlaw going down with a hole in the center of his forehead.

Then the mischief was done. The two shots had been but too successful, since each one had hit a horse. The whole four fell bodily to the side; there was a scream from the inside of the coach, and the whole outfit went over the edge of the bank.

There are such things as lucky accidents in

the world, and the accident to the stage supposed to be bound for Bad Man's Bar was one of them.

Had the road-agents made their effort a moment or two sooner, and with the same success, most likely there would have been nothing further to chronicle, save a funeral. As it was, the coach and the four horses went down, two of the latter already dying, and the others to be frightfully shattered on the rocks below, but did not go by any means as far as they would have done a little sooner or a little later, nor were any of the passengers seriously injured.

Uncle Daniel was altogether unhurt, and Slim Jimmy was only sufficiently shaken to be able to swear with his most profane vigor. The former, indeed, never lost perfect possession of his wits, and before the wreck of the coach had fairly settled to its place was pulling three badly crumpled people from the ruins.

"Nobody hurt yet? So. Bully fur we-uns! Got er chance hyer, ef things works. Git under kiver, quick! Couldn't 'a' drapped inter a better posish. Rock above ter keep 'em off, an' ef they git down ter low an' come fur us—go 'way! We hev 'em, sure. Yes, that's so. Pity, but I'll hev ter shoot them hosses. They're busted all open, an' are n. g. Make good breastwork, though. Hyer they go."

Two shots, and the struggles of the two animals ceased. The other two had never moved after the fall.

The Orpheus had all his wits about him, and the rest were rapidly recovering their normal quantity. Leona had not been hurt at all, while her father and Mr. Woburn had not been seriously harmed. They began to struggle to their feet in a manner that disgusted the fiddler, who uttered a warning cry:

"Look sharp, thar, an' keep under kiver. You'll be apt ter hear frum 'em in about a minnit, an' they won't be keeful how they talk."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when there was a movement above.

"You, down thar; ef ye're hurt, it's yer own fault. Jest keep cool till we kin come down an' git ther toll, an' we'll see then what's ter be done ter help yer."

"Keep cool yerselves, we don't want no help hyer," was the response of the vagabond. "Thar's jest room ernuf fur us, an' more would make it too full fur ary use. We don't want ter hurt yer, but ef yer crowd us—good-by, John! That's so."

The agents had said that they knew something about Uncle Daniel, and from the way they had acted they did not seem to have much of an opinion of him. But a little experience can do a heap of teaching; and his companions in the gulch were still an unknown quantity. They acted with increasing prudence, and when a head that was carefully raised beyond the protection of the bank, some twenty or thirty yards down the trail, instantly received a bullet, that was planted with deadly precision, they kept out of harm's way and evidently held a little consultation. There was not much danger of the party getting away, and there was no indication of a necessity for haste.

Meantime the passengers crouched under the roof of overhanging rock, while Jim mournfully examined his shattered coach and dead horses.

Leona noted that his position was exposed, as well as his helpless look.

"If you are wise you will get back nearer to the wall. You can do nothing now; but your help will be needed when the fight begins."

"Sorry, mum," he responded, with solemn disrespect. "Ther fact are I ain't much on ther fight, an' ef I war it wouldn't do much good arter ther durned foolishness, w'ich, savin' yer presence, mum, war ernuf ter make a hog sick. They'll be goin' fur blood an' ha'r, now; an' don't yer furgit it. It's heaven's mussy thet we're 'lowed a leetle time ter say our prayers. But ther deal's 'bout over, an' ther time ter cash w'ot chips are left are mighty nigh."

Then Jimmy moodily folded his arms, and didn't take even the trouble to dodge his head when a pistol-ball came singing along so close that he felt its wind on his cheek.

"A pwetty sort of a man you are foah the company to entwist our lives to," exclaimed the dude, galvanized into a show of more animation than he had hitherto seemed capable of. "I assure you, your conduct shall be reported to the company. Foah all you cah we might be—aw—all murdered in our beds."

"An' ez ther dod-rotted foolishness killed for 'em four hosses I'd jest remark, ef yer don't want ter pay fur 'em yer better don't. What-cher s'pose ther comp'ny runs this line fur? Whatcher s'pose they hires me fur? Ter hev every durned ijeot puttin' his fur up when ther tax c'lector kims our way? Not ary. Nary! Ef yer don't want ter fork over when yer hear 'em shout jest leave yer coin at home; an' you stay thar ter take keer ov it. You hear me?"

"Aw! I should remark. It is not necessary to elevate your voice—Gwacious! they mean business!"

There wasn't a doubt about that, for the bullet that caused the remark was aimed so truly that it cut right through the crown of his glossy

high hat, though only an inch or two of it was visible as they crouched under the protecting rock.

Uncle Daniel, at the fore as commander-in-chief, had been quietly taking in all the chances. He was pretty certain that as yet the agents had not started in their actual movement against the works, which he was just as certain that they intended to make. He thought he saw, too, that the very means they were taking to mask their movements, by keeping them well under cover and unable to see what was in the wind, might be in their favor. He turned sharply to Slim Jimmy.

"I say, Jimmy, you know ther way ter ther Bar, an' ther way ter git outen this scrape are fur you ter take it. You kin drap down over ther rocks, thar, an' ther rest kin scramble after. Don't stop ter argy. I'll be hyer, keepin' 'em busy; an' they'll never miss yer till yer half-way ter camp. Ef yer waits till they're down b'low we're all gone up ther flume. That's so!"

The driver did not jump at the scheme. While it offered a chance for escape, in the event of failure his imagination pictured the results in crimson colors. He said nothing; and looked stubborn.

"I thort so, Jimmy; an' I hate ter do it, but I'll hev ter act accordin'. Thar's yer one chanct—hyer's yer other. Choose durned quick. Ef they can't hev a guide I'll hev a corpse. We're ole fien's, Jimmy, but this are business, chuck up—an' thet's suthin' else. That's so."

"And what will you be doin'?" asked Jimmy, eying with some consternation the revolver that suddenly pointed his way, with the hammer back.

"I'll be holdin' 'em dead level, hyer, tell you git safe outen ther woods. Then I'll be takin' keer cy meself; an' jest how's none ov yer business. Las' time. ARE yer goin', er ain't yer?"

The stroller held the drop, meant what he said, and wanted a quick answer.

He got it. Without a word Slim Jimmy turned to the left and began to descend, hugging the wall closely as he went.

"Foller him," continued Uncle Daniel, with a wave of his hand. "He kin take yer through; an' he'll do it, ef yer kin keep him down ter his work."

"And you? How can we leave you? No. You shall not risk your life alone. If you stay we remain."

The courage of Leona was remarkable, but it did not seem to enthuse Uncle Daniel. He caught her by the arm, and urged her along.

"When it comes ter talkin' 'bout stayin' with a ole, wuthless fiddlin' vagabones like me, it's showin' a good heart but a mighty pore head. Ef I left my bones hyer it wouldn't make no great differens. It'd be nothin' but a ole tramp gone over ther divide. What's that ter you? All ther same I ain't a furgittin'. Ye'r in more danger than yer thinks, an' I'll do my level best ter git yer out. Now, light! Thar's no time fur more foolin'."

He hurried them away, Mr. Darelle evidently taking the same view of the subject, and urging Leona along in the wake of the rapidly departing driver.

When the stroller turned back to his niche in the rocks he had a pretty well-founded hope that the men above could not see what was going on so close to the base of the rocks; and there was a chance, by a little judicious use of firearms, to keep their attention so closely fixed on the spot that the fugitives would make an offing unnoticed.

He crawled carefully to the right, and reached, at some little distance, a point where he could obtain a better view.

Hardly had he reached the spot when his hand went up, with a finger on a trigger. Four or five men were in sight and range, dropping down the mountain-side, evidently intent on taking up a position below.

At the report of Uncle Daniel's pistol the foremost of these three threw up his hands with an unearthly screech, and tumbled over backward, while the rest disappeared as if by magic, in an instantaneous search for cover.

Then there was a silence for a moment or two, broken finally by a cry from the sentinels above on the trail, and a little later the scurry and rattle of the hoofs of a number of horses, urged recklessly down the mountain-side.

CHAPTER V.

THE GUESTS GATHER IN.

"GOOD ernuf," muttered the musician, as he heard the sounds. "Betcher life ther fun's over. Longhand won't stay ter fight a gang like that. Pity I didn't know they war a-comin'. Might 'a' saved ther lam's a tramp. But, mebbe it's better this way. Squint straight, Unkel Dan'l, an' mebbe you'll git a chanct fur a snap-shot at Longhand hisself. He ain't showed up yet, but he's sumwhar in ther bresh, I'll bet a big apple!"

With wonderful acuteness he fathomed what was coming; but he made a slight mistake about the outlaws. They had courage enough when it was needed, as the record showed, but at other times took precious good care of their lives.

But, anyhow, the one warning cry was sufficient. Every soul had disappeared before the horsemen came in sight.

"Hello! What's been going on here?" exclaimed a crisp, careless voice. "Here's about the spot, and it looks as though there had been some bad work. Eh! Good heavens! Look down here! Blood on the trail and the hearse over the ledge. We're in time for a funeral, if we have missed the fun."

The young man was staring down at the shattered coach and the dead horses as he spoke; and at the suggestive sight it was no wonder that he spoke in some excitement—or that his hand threw up a revolver suggestively as he caught the sound of a voice from below.

"Sca'ssly. I'll bet all my coin on it thet they've toted all their corpses away, an' our side ain't got any. We're all hunkus-dorus, tho' it war a mighty tight squeeze fur a minnit. I'll be thar shortly an' tell yer all 'bout it."

By dint of hard scrambling at the most accessible point, Uncle Daniel reached the trail, and with him he brought his violin, which he had rescued unharmed from the coach.

He found himself facing half a dozen men, all well mounted and armed, and the first speaker seemed to be their acknowledged leader.

"It's yerself, is it, Hart Hawkins? I thort I hed got yer sized up about right while we war a-talkin' down below, but I warn't dead sure. It war jest a streak ov hog luck fur me ez sent yer this way, fur ef you hadn't 'a' come, I'd 'a' passed in sure."

"But what has happened? Tell us that without any roundabout nonsense. Perhaps we're not too late to do a little more good."

Very briefly for him, did Uncle Daniel give his account, explaining how he had attempted to run the stage through, and the fortunate catastrophe that followed. It was too late to head off the fugitives now, short of the Bar, which he suggested they should reach as soon as possible. If the party had not arrived, or did not come in shortly, it would still be time enough to organize a hunt for them before night closed in entirely.

Hart Hawkins glanced down the mountain-side and saw that it would be impossible to follow on horseback. Then he turned to the stroller.

"Sorry, old man, that we haven't a mount—" "Don't say nother word. Unkel Dan'l'll git thar, an' you kin set 'em up when I arrive."

He made a sweeping gesture down the trail, and without another word Hawkins and a single companion dashed away, followed closely by the rest of the horsemen.

In fact, the half-dozen that had so opportunely come to the rescue had left Red Bend in pairs, Hart Hawkins starting with his pard last of all. As they were better mounted chance brought them to the front just when they seemed most to belong there.

It was not long before the two were fully out of earshot of the rest, even if the rattle of hoofs had not fully drowned their words at any distance.

"I say, Samuel, don't it strike you that there is some luck in this? There's not a reasonable doubt but what this was the charming little female we saw at the Bend. Told you I'd strike her trail again. Wish I had been along sooner. Might have had her up behind me this blessed minute. Pity she has to go tramping through the gulches to the Bar when she might be riding in style. Guess there's no chance of bringing them on the trail once more?"

He looked wistfully down among the tree-tops that still showed below them, and then turned in actual surprise. Silent Sam had answered him.

Hart Hawkins and his pard were about as different as two men could well be, in looks, ways, and reputation.

Hawkins was a natty, airy little fellow, with fashionable clothes and plenty to say.

His partner was heavy, stolid, and so quiet that he was known as Silent Sam. Yet the two men were as close friends as two men could well be, and had been for years.

"Pard," said Sam, solemnly, "ef I war you I'd face ther other way, an' take ther back track. Sure ez yer live that woman's goin' to be medicine for you. I hed a bad dream las' night, thet you wouldn't lissen to this mornin', thet don't go fur nothin'. Ef yer knows what's good fer you you'll bunch 'em fur a fresh deal, an' go back ter Red Bend. I've sed my say now, an' ef yer wants ter go ahead you'll hev Sam Loftus right behind yer. All ther same I'm bettin' we're goin' inter a tougher racket than you an' me ever got onto, afore. Don't yer trust her. I've on'y seen her face onc't; but she's a cat that'll scratch deep an' quick, an' I on'y wish thet they hed kerried her clean away. What yer say, pard? Fer onc't will yer take ther back trail?"

"Ha, ha!"

Hart Hawkins had a musical laugh, and there was no mistaking his earnestness as it rung out.

"Silent Sam turning preacher! No, no, old man. I'm not turning back. You can, if you want; but I started to open a bank at the Bar and I intend to do it. If my nerves ain't all gone I'll make it pay, and if that little angel is

looking for a lively young man, why, I'm here—and hang the balance."

Silent Sam did not even turn toward the speaker. His eyes rested on the off ear of the horse he was riding, and his face was stolidly unsympathetic. For all the sign he gave one would not have suspected that he had heard a word that his friend had said.

That was no new experience, however; and as they rattled along the trail there was an animated monologue, in which Hart Hawkins answered himself to his heart's content, and Sam Loftus remained assilient a seuer. What all was said would scarcely interest the reader; and has no further bearing on the story. Enough that the two rode into Bad Man's Bar, some distance ahead of the rest, and drew up in front of the Happy Home as naturally as though they had always lived there.

In spite of its name the Happy Home was kept by a full-fledged Dutchman, who rejoiced in the cognomen of Jacob Hoopnagle—when he got it. For the most part he was called "Dutch Jake" as a matter of reference, and simply "Jake" when personally addressed. All the same he knew how to keep a hotel, and was thoroughly popular with the boys. He came out to meet the new arrivals, and recognized them on the instant.

"Hart Hawkins! Vell, eef I nefer! Vot sprungs you here? Cladt to see mit you. Tumble in. You're shoost in dime for supper. Ven you coom town?"

"That you, Jake? Glad to see you. Heard you had a bang-up lay-out here and struck for it. Just book Sam and me for about a year. And as for grub—we're ready and willing. But say, Jake; has Slim Jimmy arrived, with a couple of his cargo in tow? There's been the worst kind of a little racket back there on the Ten-mile Cut-off—coach and all over into the drink—and Jimmy and his crew started for the Bar on foot-back."

"Anyo y killed?" asked Jacob, with more show of animation.

"No humans; but it was death on horseflesh. The whole four gone up the flume. Also several of the road-agents, if the latest accounts are to be believed. Old Uncle Dan'l and his fiddle were standing them off when a lot of the boys from Rat Trap came up for the funeral. Long-hand skipped then, he did, and Dan'l said his friend had struck out overland. Ought to be here by this time if they are coming."

"Pears ter me they vos a-coomin' now. Vot vos dot oop der stadt?"

"Correct, as usual. Go slow, gents, and don't make them think they have landed in a nest of catamounts. There's a lady in the outfit that is a lady, and I wouldn't advise any of you gents to look at her cross-eyed. Uncle Daniel is a desperate character, and he has them under his especial wing. When he ain't here, why, I'm around. For further reference to character ask Brother Yawkub. As they appear to be all right I'm going to grub."

The reference to Uncle Daniel was greeted with a laugh that became subdued on hearing the addendum. The musician was known well enough at the Bar, and nobody thought much of him as a chief. Mr. Hart Hawkins was also known—chiefly by reputation—and there was an undeniable earnestness about him that checked the rising mirth. He and his pard were men that weren't to be trifled with.

Greatly to the satisfaction of Slim Jimmy, the journey to the Bar had been devoid of incident or danger.

At first the fugitives hurried on in breathless haste; but before long, hearing no signs or sounds of pursuit, they moderated their pace, and though the short cut was a severe one, they arrived in better condition than, at setting out, they had hoped for.

Of course it was a great relief to see the Bar, waiting with its protecting arms outstretched. Until then their minds had been on a strain, imagining what might happen. Now, as soon as Miss Leona knew that they were out of danger, she felt the result of what she had undergone, and ten minutes more of it might have broken her down completely. A delegation of curious citizens was gratefully met, though she left to her less impressionable companions the duty of giving all the explanations, and did not speak a word from the time she entered the camp until she stepped over the threshold of the Happy Home.

Slim Jimmy took upon himself all the labor of explanation.

It was observable that his opinions had undergone something of a change. He forgot the loss of his team, and was inclined to glory over having been one of the only party that had ever got away with the gang of Colonel Longhand. He went over the story of the attack and retreat two or three times in response to various calls to "jine," and each time became more and more the central figure. It would not have taken him much longer to have forgotten all about the strolling fiddler, and he was furtively looking at his boots to see if he could detect any traces of gore.

The flow of eloquence kept up until the passengers had had time to settle down to the ways of the house and get their suppers—a meal they

enjoyed with a gusto they had hardly expected an hour or two before. Then Jimmy was brought up with a round turn. The passengers wanted their baggage, and the landlord was suggesting to him that he should take the horses in the stables, and his wagon, and go back to bring in whatever was transportable.

"Exqueeze me; but I think I rather guess not," was his answer.

"They might come back; an' whar'd I be ef they ketched me thar? Send some ov ther boys. Wouldn't mind it ef it warn't after dark; but I ain't perspectin' round ther Ten-mile Cut-off when I ain't no bizzness thar."

Half a dozen heard him, and joined in the laugh; but it made no difference, laugh never hurt any one; bullets had, plenty of times. He preferred the side of safety, and he kept there, though his vaporings were pretty well stopped for the time being.

Then, in a moment or two, he wished he had decided differently. As Jacob, accompanied by Sidney Darelle, was going out to see what better fortune they would find in attempting to make arrangements elsewhere, they found that it was not necessary to look further. The baggage came of its own accord.

To explain. Much to the surprise of everybody, a special coach came rolling in, the boots jam full of trunks and bundles, though only two passengers were within. The vehicle halted at the door, just as a man's face appeared, looking out through the glow of the lamp that was over the door of the Home.

"Look!" whispered Leona, at her father's shoulder. "A woman! Who can it be?"

"Hush!" he answered. "Do not draw attention to yourself. I saw no woman."

"Look again, then."

He did look again, and now the man, whose face had appeared so sharply limned at the window, was standing on the ground, his back toward the hotel, his hands held up, while lightly floating to the ground came the feminine whose presence Leona had detected.

She was undeniably beautiful. Apparently some years younger than Miss Darelle, she was almost a duplicate in figure; but about her face—though there was some general resemblance—there was a freshness and a bloom that was lacked by the other, and her eyes were black and sparkling.

She tripped lightly up the steps, and brushed past Leona, who drew a little aside. As she went she found time to fling a whisper:

"I must see you to-night. Be ready when the chance comes, and not a word to any one. Your life—perhaps more—may depend on it."

Then she ran on lightly into the house, leaving Leona struck dumb by the mysterious warning.

CHAPTER VI.

"FOR WHEN A WOMAN WILL, SHE WILL; AND WHEN SHE WON'T, SHE WON'T."

THE young lady having vanished, Leona, perhaps in hopes of finding some explanation of the singular warning, turned once more toward the coach; and this time she had a full view of the face of the gentleman who had been one of the two inside passengers.

To her surprise she saw that it was Egbert Shaw.

He seemed to be fully as much surprised as herself: though for a different and a more unpleasant reason. From the hind boot of the conveyance some one came dropping out; and it did not take Leona a second glance to see that it was the ungainly young man who had intruded upon them at Red Bend, and who had declared his intention of getting to Bad Man's Bar, if he had to walk.

He was there; and he hadn't walked, either. In some mysterious way he had managed to stow himself away in the extra, and had, despite the governor's warning, come into the camp with the special.

At least, that was what Shaw made out of it, and as he watched the young pilgrim, a wrathful flame crept into his face, his hand slid to his hip, and for a moment it looked as though the life of the intruder was not worth two cents purchase money.

Leona watched the meeting in breathless eagerness. Possibly she overheard something of the threat made at Red Bend; at all events she understood the situation; and the methods of Governor Shaw at the *denouement* were subjects of interest to her now, when confidences were just trembling on her lips.

The youth—for really he seemed but little more—seemed somewhat surprised, but by no means abashed at the meeting.

After the first shadow of hesitation he slouched forward, his hand awkwardly extended on the possibility of its receiving a shake.

"How d'y?" he said, leisurely. "Tommy Tough ain't fur behind ther hearse. When he sez he's comin' he alkers gits thar. Gosh!"

"I think I told you there might be some personal danger at the end of the journey: you probably forgot that part of it. As a personal affront I might call you to account here and now; but I think the matter can be safely left in the hands of the boys of the Bar. Walk a chalk-line, my young friend, and the cyclone won't hit you quite so soon."

"Mebbe, seein' ez I'm on'y a striplin' ov a boy, ef you'll speak a good word fur me, it won't strike at all. Anyhow, I'm much obleeged ter yer, an' when I kin do yer a good turn jest name it. Tommy Tough ain't many frien's; but them ez he hez he jest don't disremember. So long. I'm hungry ez a bar, an' I'll see yer later."

He slouched away into the house, passing Leona with a recognizing grin; and found his way to the dining-room undisturbed by Hoopnagle, who accepted all grist that came to his mill, as long as there was the coin to back it. That he saw Tommy was beyond a doubt, for there was not much escaped his sharp eyes, though at the moment he was engaged with Leona in a brief conversation.

When the danger of an immediate racket between the two passengers seemed to be over she touched on the shoulder the worthy landlord, who happened to have taken his stand just in front of her.

"Excuse me, but as a stranger here I can't help asking questions. Who are the two arrivals by the stage? They seem to be well known here. In fact, I have met the gentleman before; but the lady seems strangely out of place in an out of the way little town like this."

"Eh, so! Dot vas der Fairy Fan, der venale-dot runs der Quartz ven she's der home. Den, der mon-dot vas der Goobender Shaw, dot keeries der town in his pritches bocket. Ven goodt mon der die to eef he's ready der cadch on; undt von padt mon ven he gives der pounce. I voodn't pe in dot young veller's spoots—no, not fur coin."

"He does not seem to be eying him in a very friendly way; though indeed I think he is mistaken. The trouble began with him, if I am not wrong, back in the last town through which we passed. I must really tell the governor that we have no cause of offense with the young man. Is—is he a friend of the young lady?"

A puzzled look came in the Dutchman's face, and he hesitated before answering the question.

"Dot tepends," he responded at length.

"Meppe he vos: meppe he vosn't, yav. Dot tepends. Dey shpeaks ven dey meet, an' vhen der goobender vos aroundt der vos nody vonts ter look cross-eyed so mooch ez von vink. Put dot vos apoud all. Dey don't vos to-gedder not so mooch as any at all. Der goobender hafe too mooch on handts ter be voolin' roundt nit ter gals, an' it's shoost chance he cooms mit her in der stage. Meppe he think it not safe she cooms alone. Oh, he's a square mon, vot vood go a hoondredt miles but vot he vood see dings done right."

"Who's all that you're cracking up to the sky? I didn't know there was a square man except myself in this sink hole of iniquity—and—deal faro. Don't pile it on too thick. There isn't a soul within practicable distance that is not for sale at a thousand dollars. Don't depend on what Yawkub tells you, miss. He can run a hotel; but for information he's not worth a cent."

The smile of Mr. Hart Hawkins, as he spoke, was sufficient to win pardon for the abruptness of his address had it been seen in the dutious light; and as he got considerable of its winningness into his tones perhaps Miss Leona would not have been altogether angry if he had lingered to follow it up.

But Hawkins was on his way to look for business, and did not intend to allow pleasure to interfere. He just threw in a word or two when he hoped they would do the most damage to the other man, and then went on his road, rejoicing.

He hit a little harder than he knew, though the young lady at first did not know whether to be angry or grateful; while Hoopnagle was decidedly mad—almost too mad to answer the question that Leona put before the gay young gambler was fairly out of hearing.

"Dot? Dot vos Meester Hart Hawkins—von cardt sharp und pad man. He p'lieves in no-poddy; and no-poddy p'lieves in him. Eef der goobender hears him schling dose dalks he makes undt hole gleam through mit him."

"No doubt; but I am keeping you here talking; many thanks for your information. When you are more at leisure I will ask you more at length about the people of the camp, where we will probably stay for some time. Good evening!"

Jacob had rather fancied the conversation at first; but the turn that Hawkins had given it had made him weaken a little, and he took his release with very good grace. He left Leona standing there, and sought the recesses of the kitchen.

There was a light burning in the narrow hallway, though it failed to make a very brilliant illumination. Looking along the little row of doors, Leona saw, or seemed to see, one of them open. Then, unless she was very much mistaken, Fairy Fan, as Hoopnagle had named her, stood for an instant in the doorway, beckoning to her.

"What can she want?" was the muttered question. "It is possible that she is a particular friend of Mr. Shaw, and has heard him mention our interview. It is worth while to find out. If he is a boaster I never again want to speak to him, and then, she may be jealous. Decidedly, I must discover which it is; and to do that there."

is only one way. I suppose it is safe to trust myself with her alone. If she tries any foul play—ah!”

Her hand dropped to her bosom and she felt the butt of the revolver hidden there.

The touch reassured her.

Without another sign of hesitation she glided back until the door was reached, which she opened without knocking.

There had been no mistake. Fairy Fan had lit a lamp, in anticipation of an answer to her signal, and sat quietly beside a small table that stood in the center of the apartment. Jacob had been compelled to economize space, and both the rooms occupied by Miss Fanny would not have made a fair bedchamber for one who had ever tasted the comforts of hostelry further East.

There was no show of cordiality between the two, and their words, at the beginning at least, were slow and formal.

“Although perfectly unaware of what may be your intention and desire, I have acceded to your request. What you may have to say, say quickly, for I wish to return to my father before he notices that my absence has been prolonged. What is it that is of so much importance to me?”

“You seem strangely unconcerned after the warning that I have already given. Did you know this country as well as you should you would understand that such a hint of danger is never to be despised.”

“You said, I believe, that my life was in danger. How, and why? And how comes it that you, a stranger, are aware of the fact? Perhaps I can be pardoned for receiving the hint with some suspicion. Any one who could know anything of the kind might be interested in obtaining control of my movements. To tell the truth—as I always do, frankly—I am inclined to suspect you and your purposes.”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t do that. I cannot, I dare not speak as plainly as I wish, but I assure you that, so far as I have gone, I have but told you the simple truth. Either your life or more than your life is in danger while you remain here. Be wise; be governed by me. Leave this camp at once! I can supply you with a sufficient excuse, if needs be; and in some of the neighboring towns, where you both will be comparatively safe, you may meet with more success in the objects of your mission than if you remained here a year.”

“Thank you, but the thing is impossible. If you really wish to do me a favor, explain exactly what the danger is that menaces us, and at whose hands.”

“Swear to me that you will never betray me!”

“I give you my promise, which amounts to just the same.”

“Very well, so far as I dare speak my warning is this: There are desperate men who have sworn that the search you are engaged in shall never prove successful. There is a desperate man who has fixed his eyes on you. The two may come in conflict; but, whichever way that ends, it will not help you. Beware of friends as well as foes—and, most of all, beware of Egbert Shaw!”

Her voice sunk with the last few words almost to a whisper, and she looked uneasily around even as she spoke. If she was not in earnest she was a consummate actor.

And yet—was she in earnest? And if so, why? Leona scarcely took time to consider the question, though it came to her like a flash.

“If you are speaking in good faith—thanks. And yet, I am bold to say that I doubt you. Womankind are not apt to bestow such favors on others of their sex without a reason; and that reason a selfish one. If you know this much it must be because you have been within the lines of my enemies, and from what you say I should judge that you mean to stay there. Egbert Shaw would no doubt feel truly grateful if he knew what the woman who is posing as his friend has to say in regard to him; but rest easy. I shall never inform him unless you force me to speak. Then, beware! I can act as well.”

“Enough, enough! I have given my warning. If you do not choose to take it, my skirts will be clear. Watch over your father and his wealth; but, above all, watch over your own life and liberty; even though here, if you remain long enough, no vigilance can save you. If death or dishonor has no terror for you, remain. In the end you will see whether my warning was honestly meant or not. Now, go. And beware how you reveal this interview. If questioned—you found your way to my room by mistake, and only lingered a moment to make your apologies. Your safety and mine require that much.”

“Thanks. I will protect you—and at the same time myself.”

She drew herself up proudly as she spoke, and without the formality of an adieu, turned and left the room a spring-lock on the door closing behind her with a click.

“Useless, I suppose,” muttered Miss Fanny, “and I cannot say that now I care for her; yet I *must* do my duty, and protect myself as well. If an explosion comes, who could say that I didn’t have a hand in it? And perhaps I have just gone far enough to sacrifice myself. Who can tell?”

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPREAD AT DIAMOND CHARLEY’S LAY-OUT.

“THE more money you put down the less you will take up—maybe! We’re not running this game for the benefit of poor relations, and we don’t want any squealers to buck *this* tiger. If you’ve got the sand for a pull for your bottom dollar, then hustle in; we’re playing for keeps, and there’s no limit but the bank. Come for us, pards, if you mean sporting; but stay out if you’re not thoroughbred. We’re after blood and hair.”

The gang at Bad Man’s Bar just enjoyed a game of that kind, and the introductory overture of Mr. Hawkins was answered by a good-natured laugh. Time enough to double-bank the new arrivals, when they had been cleaned out of their coin.

The fact was that Hart Hawkins had struck the Bar just in the nick of time.

Charley Shiffler’s dealer had caught sudden death the night before; and Charley, though a good enough man behind the butt of a revolver, even if he was looking into a piece of iron with a hole in it, couldn’t deal faro worth a cent. On a square deal his luck would have sent him burst if he had had the Bank of California behind him; and with a combination-box he was just as liable to pull ten cards as two—which bothered the case-keeper when he tried to arrange the turns.

It really seemed to Diamond Charley that a special dispensation of Providence had hit him just where he lived when the sport, last of Red Bend, came in with his pard, and talked about opening a little game in the ranch if he had not found any one to supply the place of the defunct Mr. Bailey.

Willing? Of course he was willing; and he mentally vowed that he would feel around the claws of the jungle king himself, since he did not think they would try any foolishness with him, and the new arrival had made a quiet display of enough capital to wreck all the souls in camp.

So, to the temporary disadvantage of the Bar, the most of the visitors took one drink, and then abruptly turned away to pass through the red curtains swinging in the wide doorway leading to the room devoted to chance, the first flight of them listening to the exordium as already recorded.

The game, however, opened very quietly. The men of the Bar had mostly cut their eye-teeth, and wanted to see just how it would be played. Of course they expected a square game; but no one was very anxious to rush the test at his own expense.

Things opened out decidedly in favor of the bank. This one, that one, and the other one, dropped a few dollars, meantime watching the dealing most thoroughly.

There was not a sign of anything crooked, and Charley Shiffler himself had just laid in a small stack of checks, intending to try a light tussle, when the curtains were pushed aside, and at least a dozen men entered.

Though they came together in a little crowd, there were all sorts of men and interests in the set; and if looks went for anything, some of the sorts were pretty low down. Yet, foremost of the lot came Governor Shaw, with Sidney Darelle on one arm and Wellington Woburn on the other.

The presence of the dude had not been specially desired by either, and if the others had expressed their secret thoughts, they would have been pronounced a dispensation that he would have been only too glad to spare.

After her interview with Fairy Fanny—as yet she had heard no other name for her—Leona first sought her father.

Finding that he was in his room, and professed to be too tired to talk and anxious for rest, she bade him good-night and sought her own couch, which was in the adjoining room.

It was still early in the evening, measured by the standard of the denizens of the Bar; yet, after a long ride, and with no immediate excitement on hand, it was not by any means too early to think of retiring.

It may be that Sidney Darelle was acting in good faith; but half an hour later, when Leona had sailed away into the regions of dreamless slumber, he rose quietly, opened the door without the least noise, and made his way through the hall to the office.

Half a dozen or more men were lounging there, listening to Egbert Shaw, who was giving the gossip of the outside world as he had learned it during a brief absence.

It was easy to be seen that the governor was a man of note at the Bar. Few other people would have been listened to with half the attention, or could have given his auditory half the real satisfaction.

He had just come to the end of a paragraph as Darelle entered, and nodded to him in a friendly way, extending his hand.

“Glad to see that you are none the worse for the shaking up of the day, and the little adventure you had as a wind up. We older fellows can stand a heap of tough work, though, and be ready for more when we have once had our noses in the feed-box. I hope your daughter did

not find the excitement too much for her nerves. She hardly looks rugged enough for the ways of our wild and woolly West.”

“She has no nerves, sir, ough! She is a perfect fraud in appearances. After all she has gone through she found no trouble in dropping off to sleep as though she was safely under her own roof. And I, sir—ough! I am too nervous to sit still, too nervous, sir, to do business; too nervous for any use at all. An hour awake, sir, ough! in that fusty, musty pigeon-hole, would drive me crazy. I came down here, sir, to save my wits.”

Then the old gentleman wound up with a fit of coughing that seemed to shake him all to pieces, and suggested a very good reason why he did not care for self-contemplation, alone, in the dark.

A sympathizing look came to the face of Egbert Shaw.

“I know how it is myself, for I have been there. You won’t find mooning around here much better. Suppose we take a walk around town—anything to divert your mind until your nerves have a chance to react. Then, with a nightcap of Jacob’s old Bourbon, you can turn in and sleep like a top.”

The old gentleman hesitated. If Egbert Shaw had been at all impolite he would have detected him casting an anxious look over his shoulder in the supposed direction of the room occupied by Leona.

“I don’t know. The night air is bad for my throat—ough! It is inclined to be weak—chronic irritation, you see. But it can’t be worse than staying here. Lead on, sir, ough! Under your guidance I will try to view the town.”

“Aw, couldn’t you have mawcy, aw, on another unfawtunate innocent? Aw, I feel vewy like aw fwiend—in need of a good Samawitan. Aw, I cawn’t go alone; and I don’t, aw, see any other chawnce for company.”

It was here that Mr. Woburn put in his work, and the innocence of the appeal caused the governor to run his eye sharply over the young man from Boston. He looked like a prosperous young man, and like a simple young man. Perhaps under other circumstances, Egbert Shaw would have been pleased to take him under the shadow of his wing; now, if he had had a fair excuse, ready at hand, he would have been more than pleased to leave him behind.

As, however, they had been companions, and on speaking terms in the stage, and there was no reason pat to hand for doing otherwise, without showing more of the bear than the gentleman, Shaw nodded.

“To tell the truth I would sooner you had visited a fashionable clothing store and got yourself inside of something a little better suited to the location; but as the boys have slipped up once or twice on the styles, they may let you through without question. If they don’t you will have to hoe your own row.”

“Thanks, aw. Being just in the wuff, so, aw, to speak, they will, aw, pawdon any irregularity in costume. When my trunks come, aw, I will try to do better.”

“Don’t, for mercy’s sake; or they won’t have nerve enough to see the raise. Come; if we are going it is time that we made a start.”

As far as the outside show went there was not much to be seen at Bad Man’s Bar. It was after the usual style of mining-camps, though here and there was a shanty with a little more show of permanence and pretension than the average. No wonder, then, that after a brief stroll the governor took them inside.

And the first place he struck was, of course, Charley Shiffler’s lay-out.

Sidney Darelle’s eyes sparkled as he caught sight of the table and game, though an instant later he drew back with a well-feigned repugnance, and looked up at his guide reproachfully, as though he thought he should be ashamed of bringing him into such a place.

Shaw caught the look, and understood it.

“Oh, you needn’t be afraid that you will lose caste with our good people. They are all on it, bigger than a wolf, and I myself am no exception. Charley’s lay-out is the regular thing to do of an evening. You drop a few dollars; or you pull in a handful, and go to bed with a clear conscience, feeling as though you belonged at the Bar. Not that you are bound to do it, at all. If you don’t understand the game you are welcome to look on till you think you do. Besides, this, I take it, is a soap game to-night. Mr. Bailey went over the range last evening, and as I see Shiffler is getting ready to buck against the bank, I judge the dealer is backed by his own resources, and they are probably limited.”

“I think—ough! that I understand. The fact is, I want to stand fairly well with the people of the Bar, and so do not care to do anything that would put me in bad odor. I do enjoy a game of bluff, now and then; but faro is something I never meddled with. It is too entirely a guessing game for me to take much stock in; and I hardly know how it is run. And I do not care to pay enough out to give me an idea. Still, if things are as you say, I don’t mind getting a little of an insight. You play, ough! and I will look on.”

As near as he ever got to Lanter was Sidney

Darelle as the two stood a little to one side talking in an undertone.

"All right, I'll wait a few moments and see how the cards are running. I heard of this Hawkins as we went through Red Bend, and they tell me he knows all the spots by name."

"Who—who is his partner? The man at his elbow. If either of them is dangerous he is the one. His face looks familiar to me, though I cannot place it."

"I understand he goes by the name of Silent Sam; and I have no doubt he is good enough for the company he keeps. He is certainly as powerfully built a fellow as I have seen for a long time. Ah, they have no more mercy for Diamond Charley than for the rest of them. He is either dealing a square game, or else he is playing for keeps from the word go. See. They gather him in. I don't think this is our night on."

If the old gentleman with the cough counted on the governor doing any reckless playing he made a broad mistake. That was not the way he had made his position at Bad Man's Bar. It was because he *always* won that he had been tacitly elected a chief; and he had never thrown away the title by wildly sailing into a game that he didn't understand. He was aware that he had some pretended friends, who would be glad enough to see him go to the wall; and just now he didn't intend to give them the chance.

Still, he had brought the old gentleman there for a purpose. It was part of it to keep him there for a while, and he had his doubts if it could be done if both remained simply lookers-on. His hand had already gone to his pocket, with an eye to a small investment in chips, when an unexpected chance came to the rescue.

Mr. Woburn, who had somehow drifted away from them, and who had been staring around a little more inanely than usual, had finally taken an interest in the lay-out, and was just investing five dollars on the queen.

"Let them—aw—stay thaw," drawled Woburn.

Hart Hawkins gave the dude a quick look, and Silent Sam a steady stare. If the gentleman from Boston had come in with any one else but Governor Shaw he would probably have been in trouble before this. The Bar was apt to lay, *en masse*, for just such looking in individuals—the last outsider that brought a high hat in was calmly reposing in the general graveyard.

The other men in the game did not notice the by-play; but the outsiders did—and just in time. A gentleman, generally known in his absence as "Pluggy" Becker, had fancied himself somewhat aggrieved. When Wellington Woburn sidled up to the table he elbowed Becker just the slightest—and Pluggy was "a chief." The hand of the tough clinched, and his elbow went back. He had it in for the dude on the instant, if his partner had not given him a warning twitch.

"Hol' on, Pluggy. He come in with Eg. Shaw; you jes' want ter go a leetle slow. He may be a friend ov hissen; an' he may jest be holy ole lightnin' 'ith brimstun 'round ther edges. Ef I war you I'd wait an' see. Then you'll know what ye'r lookin' at, an' how ter take him."

The only answer was a low growl; but the advice was good. With Eg. Shaw in the distance, it wasn't so hard to take, either. Mr. Becker simply held his hand till he could be certain that he had found a convenient season.

And the glance of Hart Hawkins almost convinced him that, as yet, he had not.

CHAPTER VIII.

WELLINGTON WOBURN TACKLES THE QUEEN—AND SOMEBODY ELSE.

MR. WOBURN'S second venture on the queen proved a success, and the Bar, as represented, felt a rising interest, intense as it was sudden. Very strange it was, but no one was at that moment so nearly the center of all eyes. Perhaps a whisper that had somehow started around the room had something to do with it.

Major Bang, another prominent citizen, was in general a cyclopedia of information. He had been a true rolling stone in his time, and had rolled into the Bar some months ago. As he had some knowledge of the most of the strangers who followed him, and a personal acquaintance with a majority, the result was his dictum—not good for much else—was sound authority for any required biographical statement.

The major had seen the suppressed offer of Pluggy Becker, and just had time to consider, when Alligator Abe gave him a gentle shove with his elbow.

"Who'n thunder's that? Blame my hide ef I kin make out ef he's a saint from a calf-pen, er a sinner on wheels. 'Tain't likely ther Gov 'd be towin' him 'round ef thar warn't a bright streak somewhar. You know him, say?"

"Him? I wouldn't, sah, I really wouldn't make an affidavit to the fact; but if I was asked, sah, for my personal opinion, I would suggest that I saw him in Tucson in '78. Carey, sah, was the name of the individual I then met—and some of the boys recollect him as Hair Trigger Tom. Perhaps it is not the same man—if he leaves the room without crooking his

finger and dropping a corpse, in the absence of any clear explanation you may set it down as my mistake. I have heard of him later on and elsewhere, but there, sah, was the only place I met him."

"Pears a youngish lookin' rooster ter hev flourished thar then; but ef he *are* a daisy, he's six ox-eyes on a long stem. This hyar Hawkins seems ter know him, an' not know anything too good fur him. Ef thar ain't fun hyar afore ther deal's over, you kin make up yer mind some one hes took water. Carey, yer say—Hair Trigger Tom, ov Tucson? Good enough. Ther boyees won't bother him till they see what's his game."

"Yer jest missed a circus," Abe whispered in the ear of Becker, a moment later. "You kin lay fur him furdur on, but you want ter hev the drop when yer begins biz. It's Hair Trigger Tom, ov Tucson. Ther major knows him ov old."

"Tom Carey, eh?"

"That's the handle that Bang gives him; and he ought to know."

Becker's mouth went up into a pucker.

"Good ernuf, now I knows it. I've heard ov him. But ef I'd gone fur him ez a flat what a holy ole sharp I'd 'a' picked up. Whatcher s'pose he's after hyar? Wonder ef ther gov'nor knows?"

"Ef Bang knowed him yer kin trust Eg. Shaw. But ef they're standin' in terguther it won't be ez well ter give him ther pointer thet ther major hez dropped to him; an' wot he knows th' hull blasted camp 'll know in about five minutes. Thunder an' blazes! He's copped ther queen, an' won ag'in."

Sure enough the dude seemed to have struck a vein that was worth the working, if the opening successes went for anything. The money wasn't so much, but he had broken the luck of the bank; and the question was whether it was a general smash or not. If he had been acting as Hart Hawkins's capper he could not have done him a better turn, since several who had not yet been betting went in to see, and Charley Shiffler invested in another little pile of chips.

The break-up was *not* complete, as those who had invested more heavily than ever found out. Wellington Woburn won, which was more than any one else did; and there was just the last turn left in the box.

The dude had raked in his winnings, and was about to lay his checks for a call. His hand lingered over the lay-out, along with several other hands, when, from the bar-room came the sound of a couple of harsh chords tortured out of a violin.

Woburn changed his mind at once, and slipped his checks into his pocket.

"Aw, musithk. It's the strolling fiddler. Weally, I pewfer, don't you know? When he weties I can, aw, see you again."

He nodded to Mr. Hawkins, and turned toward the other room, whence now came the notes of a lively breakdown.

At Charley Shiffler's the female element was seldom represented, as it was not a regular dance-house. But now and then, when music was to be had, the decks were cleared, and all hands went in for a dance, such as it was. The fun was apt to be rude—boisterous—but none the less thoroughly enjoyed because of the semi-occasional nature of its occurrence.

"Whoop!" shouted Slim Jimmy. "Git yer pardners, an' take places! Hyar's yer cowtill-yun jest a-formin', an' them that don't hurry'll git left. Hyar you are! That's all. Sides is full. Slute yer pardners! Forward four, and away yer go!"

And, amid a good-natured chorus of laughter and shouting, Slim Jimmy and the red-shirted miner he had gathered up by chance galloped up toward the opposite couple, which was none other than Pluggy Becker and the Boston dudel.

For once the young man had thrust himself too far forward for his health, for he had no idea of what followed the advent of Uncle Daniel and his fiddle at Shiffler's.

While he looked on with a grin on his face, Becker came darting out from the gaming-room. He had just had a word or two with the governor, and he wanted to be seen. He caught Woburn by the elbow and sent him spinning across the floor.

"You dance, ole man; I kin see it in yer eyes; an' this bout yer got ter dance with me. I jest want sum'un with thunder an' lightnin' in his heels, for I'm a screamer meself. Hyar we go! Forrads four!"

Woburn was taken all off of his guard. If he had chosen to object, he had no chance, though it was by no means certain that he would. Music seemed to have a remarkable effect on him. Even in the stage, in the presence of Miss Leona, he showed it plainly enough. Here, where everybody else threw off the mask, he seemed to be inclined to do the same, and he as hilarious as any of them. By the time the impulse of Pluggy Becker's arm had sent him up to the center of the set, he was all ready for the frolic, and he danced back to his place after a fashion that was new to the place, but not to be despised.

"Balance yer pardners! Swing corners!" howled Jimmy, and so the frolic went on, in the

intervals of rest the fiddle shrieking, moaning, laughing, and making more music to the square inch than a whole orchestra in a more civilized sphere.

Sidney Darelle, leaning on the arm of Egbert Shaw, gazed at the scene, a look of bewilderment on his face.

"I've been with him days, ough! days; and I never suspected he was that kind of a man," he huskily whispered. "What do you suppose his business is, out here?"

"I didn't pay much attention to him, myself, but I rather supposed that his business was to follow your daughter. Is he not an old friend of your family?"

"Friend! No, sir—ough! Never saw him before a week ago. He is—ough!—certainly a singular young man."

"Very!" acquiesced Shaw, dryly. "His name is Woburn, I believe you say? Any evidence that such is the case? The boys seem to think that he may be a sport in disguise, and are only giving him rope enough. If he tries to cut up many monkey-shines I am afraid you will be short a traveling companion and miss Leona an adorer."

"My, my, that will never do! In spite of his ridiculous appearance and antics, we are indebted to him for numerous kindnesses. And you are mistaken about his feeling for Leona. He is a friend, ough! Simply a traveling friend. Cannot we take him away?"

"Friend, or not, I am afraid that the thing has gone past our control. I warned him before we started, and I am a man of my word. He has no business here; and if his friends don't care to have a committee appointed they can furnish a coffin. Ah!"

The dance had come to an end, the music had ceased, and there was a flood of heads, all setting in one direction—toward the bar.

Or nearly all.

Mr. Woburn, when the fiddler stopped, staggered back, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with a dainty handkerchief, as he leaned against the wall for support.

Becker looked at him severely.

"You kin dance, that's a fact; but it 'pears ter me ye'r furgittin' ter drink. You see which way ther crowd's goin'?"

"Aw—thanks, but aw nevwer dwink. Not, aw, in a pawmwiscuous crowd. Aw should be happy, aw, to look on. Don't, aw, hesitate on my account."

The response almost stunned the tough. He gave a short bark, that was the nearest he could get to a laugh, and glanced covertly toward Egbert Shaw, who, at that moment, was looking at him.

The governor nodded, and Pluggy Becker returned to the charge, with a wrath that had been gathering in violence during his silence.

"You will, eh—happy ter look on! An' dog-gone yer, who's ter pay? Ye'r a stranger at ther Bar, yer hez enjoyed our amusements, put cur good coin in yer pocket, an' now wants ter crawl out with all yer spiles ter laff at us flats. Not much! It's drink er drop, an' I don't keer a darn which. Don't yer do it, stranger! *don't* yer do it! I've got yer foul. Hands up, er down yer go."

The last words rung out with startling clearness, as the hands of the dude went nervously toward the side-pockets of his short frock coat.

At the order he hesitated, as if not fully understanding it.

"Aw, weally, mister, I don't compwehend. Hands up, aw—sciah what? I pewfer not. You are not going to wob me?"

"I'm goin ter see yer drink, dog-gone yer, er I'm goin' ter pour ther p'ison down yer fly-trap with a spoon, an' pay fur it outen ther chips in yer pocket. Las' time ov askin'. Will yer drink er drop?"

"Weally, you mean it, aw?"

Somebody laughed.

Pluggy had elevated his voice a little more than he meant to, and the consequence was everybody looked his way.

The laugh maddened him. It showed that some one thought he was talking to a better man than himself, who would get away with him in the end. He didn't think so, but knew that he was safe unless something missed connection that he was generally willing to risk his life on. Yet this odd-looking genius was as cool as a cave. If he didn't understand his danger there would be no fun or profit in dropping him; if he did, then he most likely had some way out of it to fall back on, for he would hardly be taking such wild chances on a professional shooter.

All this he thought while his eyes never wandered from the face of the man he had covered. But the half-simple smile would have maddened a more patient man than he, and again he threw up his hand, this time to shoot.

Just exactly what happened after that no one for a certainty could say, and the owners of a couple score pair of eyes were watching with breathless eagerness. Wellington Woburn seemed to throw himself backward, while the sounds of a brace or more of pistol-shots echoed through the room.

Becker had fired; but he had fired a shade late. His bullet went whistling a foot or more above the head of the falling Woburn, while

he too dropped to the floor, amidst an instantaneous and unexpected flood of darkness.

"Now then, you folks there, you don't want to go fooling too close around the band wagon! It's my horn that's blowing, and I'm Charley Shiffler, boss of this lay-out."

Diamond Charley stuck to the table as long as Hart Hawkins would pull the cards; but, when the little gambler sniffed fun in the distance, and no customers near, he closed up to see what was going on, and Shiffler came also. The lights were out all over the house, and every one could hear the click of his revolver as he spoke. He meant what he said, and more.

It was Egbert Shaw's voice that broke the silence that followed.

"Oh, let up on us, Charley; I'll go bail the racket is over. If not I'll stand beside you to shoot the first man that shows rusty. There's been a little nonsense here, but I don't think anybody has been hurt. Give us a little light till we see if there's much damage."

"I'll take your word for it, governor. Johnny, see what's the matter with the lamps. I want you to understand, gentlemen, that when I allow you to have a frolic it don't mean that I am willing to have my place wrecked. There. Now we'll see who's hurt."

The light disclosed no very bloody scene. The majority of the visitors were clustered near the doors and windows, as though they had been meditating a retreat, while Pluggy Becker was sitting up in the middle of the floor, his face streaked with blood that was oozing out of a ragged little ridge on the top of his head, and staring around in a bewildered sort of way, while his revolver, only one barrel of it empty, lay a few feet from him, on the floor.

As for Wellington Woburn, he was nowhere to be seen, having disappeared utterly.

"Whar's ther fraud ez took a back shot when I wasn't lookin'? P'int him out—jest p'int him out—an' thar'll be cold meat on ther floor."

"Not this evening, Pluggy; some other evening," gently remarked Charley Shiffler. "Don't you see the governor and I have both got you lined? We want this foolishness stopped now. If you don't like it go somewhere else. Uncle Daniel, strike up the music. The boys sha'n't be cheated out of their fun."

For once the tough found himself on the unpopular side. It was too early in the evening to begin a racket such as he thought of starting, and as the proprietor meant all he said, and Becker was not ready to buck against the town, he threw up his cards with suspicious readiness.

"Ye'r' talkin' sense, Charley. Ther durned galoot got away with me ther fu'st fly, an' that's a fact. Jest look fur feathers ter float ther second. My treat, boys. I'm white ernuf ter know when ter haul in my horns, an' say ther game's gone."

He went up to the bar, followed by the crowd, while Sidney Darelle pulled anxiously at Shaw's coat-tails.

"Let us get out of this—ough! Let us get out of this. The sooner the better."

"All right. I'll go round with you to Jake's. I've had about enough myself, and may as well turn in there."

Together they quietly left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

HART HAWKINS HEARS SOME HISTORY.

THE governor and his friend lost nothing very interesting by making their retreat. Wellington Woburn did not return. Pluggy Becker took his departure. The boys enjoyed themselves, with Uncle Daniel's assistance, and Hart Hawkins, with the tact that distinguished him in such crises, made no further attempt to open his bank but ingratiated himself with some of the sporting element of Bad Man's Bar. The session at Shiffler's was not a very late one, and it was not much after midnight when Uncle Daniel took his departure, and Hawkins made the best of his way by a short cut toward Jake Hoopnagles.

He knew the route well enough, in spite of the darkness, and was going ahead with his noiseless, springy step, and his hands in his side pockets, carelessly resting on his derringers. Fearless enough, by day or night, and in any and every position, he was not altogether reckless in a strange place, knowing that, if there were wolves abroad looking for game, he would be apt to be marked for a quarry.

For that reason he heard a step in the shadows, when the sound of his own remained undetected.

On the instant he halted.

Why, he could hardly have told. It was through neither fear nor evil intent. Instinct, possibly, told him to pause and listen.

Then he heard a rough voice, a little beyond the footstep.

"That you, Cap?"

"Hush!" answered a second voice. "Do you want all the Bar listening to what you have to say?"

"Don't care much if they do," was the sulky retort, in the tones of Pluggy Becker. "After ther way you played me dirt ter-night you can't s'pose I'm feelin' jest like a lam'. I'm waitin' fur ter hear yer reasons. I been lookin' fur yer an hour."

"Reasons—and here! You must be mad. Hush; and follow. You can have all the chance to talk that you want; but I don't choose to take quite such a public place."

"Public be durned! Ef yer think I'm goin' ter fetch an' carry, an' be treated like a dog, after sich—"

"I think if I hear another word until I tell you to speak, that you'll lose the whole top of your head. You hear me—and you ought to know me, too."

The voice of the second speaker attracted Hawkins at once. He could not place it, and yet it had a familiar ring. Probably some one was speaking in disguise.

This idea interested the little gambler. If it had not struck him he would have gone on to Jake's. When he had a chance to seek his couch at a virtuous hour he liked to do it; and men like Pluggy Becker, as long as they kept out of his way, had no attraction for him.

But it might be worth while to find out who was Pluggy's side pard, since it seemed to be some one who desired to keep the knowledge from the rest of the camp.

He was nicely hidden in the shade of a vacant shanty; and was inclined to thank the chance that led him to take that route toward the hotel. Crouching there he heard Becker's final answer, an unintelligible growl, and then the two moving quietly away.

"All right, gentlemen. I'll follow and see where this little tea party is going to take place, even if I can't get in. It will be queer if I don't get some of the droppings from the sanctuary—enough to give me a point or two on this mighty chief. I suspect there was something in the air to-night that the heft of the party didn't freeze onto, and I may as well drop onto it if there's a chance. Here goes!"

He knew the danger there was in following. A chance shot in the dark seems more apt to hit some one than in the daytime; and it was pretty certain that either of the two would be willing to try one if they heard him on their trail.

Fortunately they did not have very far to go.

Though he did not know it, they were going straight to Pluggy's cabin.

At the door they halted, listening a moment for footsteps, though neither had any notion that they had been followed. It was just possible that some late night bird might be staggering home, and come within earshot of the shanty.

As Hawkins had, on the instant, dropped to the ground, he was neither seen nor heard, and the two entered.

Before they had fairly fixed themselves, Hawkins was under the window, through which, heavily curtained as it was, there came a faint gleam of light.

"Well, what yer got ter say fur yerself?" growled Becker, in an undertone.

"My good fellow, it appears to me we've had about enough of that. If you had been in any special danger, of course I would have chipped in; but as long as there was nothing to be made, why should I shock the town, and involve myself with Charley Shiffler, who would have been on it to-night larger than a wolf, if he had the chance. You swallowed a little sand; but what of that? The boys all understand the situation, and I'll see to it that nothing is said to you about it."

"Blame ther boys; it's you I'm after. Didn't yer give me the nod ter go in, an' didn't I go in fur all I war wu'th?"

"Something of the kind, I'll admit. But, my dear fellow, if I had wanted to shoot him down myself, I would have done that, in the first place. It wouldn't have been half so dangerous, and when I got through, the man would have been dead!"

"An' blame all that! That ain't what I'm squealin' at. You know. Yer got me squabblin' with another feller, an' jest when ther game got interestin', yer went fur me! Me, yer old side pard, ez hez resked his life right erlong doin' yer dirty work! Me, ez war jest then a-fightin' your battle! An' now, afore I blow yer to kingdom an' never come back ag'in, I want ter know what it war all about. Ef yer think ther durned dude'll make a better pard than Pluggy Becker, crack yer whip, an' see whar ther team goes to."

"See here, Becker, do I understand you to mean that I fired the shot that tumbled you over so nicely?"

"That's jest 'bout ther size ov it."

There was silence. The accusation staggered even the coolness of the other. It was pretty certain that Pluggy didn't mean immediate extinction, or he would not have brought the party into his own ranch; but, all the same, he was an uncomfortable man to have lying around loose with such an idea in his brain.

"I begin to see what you are driving at, at last. Why didn't you say what you meant, fair and square, at the beginning? So you think that I took the trouble to tumble you over just before the lights went out? Is that what you mean?"

"All down but nine. You couldn't 'a' hit it nearer."

"My friend, you never were further from it

in your life. I reckon that Charley Shiffler put out the lights; and as for that neat bit of shooting—I supposed that little cyclone you were fooling around just brushed you with its edges. He got his hand in his pocket before you saw it. After that, at such a distance—good-morning, my friend."

"Oh, hold on. You can't wring anything like that in on me. It's too thin. I war watchin' him; an' I war watchin' you, jest over his shoulder. He had his paws out, jest like a dancin' b'ar. I hed him kivered, too, but I didn't mean ter pull trigger unless I saw shoot in his eye. Jest then ther flash come, right frum whar you war a-standin'. Ef you didn't shoot who did?"

The other gave a peculiar cluck with his lips.

"Pluggy, I believe you're right. It *did* seem to me as though the shot came from my way; but I'll swear to you, now, since you have opened up like a man, that it didn't come from me. Who it could have been I'm not able to say. The bank had closed with the last turn, and I believe that Hawkins was standing at my shoulder, though I couldn't swear to it. There's the chance though, and if it was he it makes it pretty sure that Woburn is a heap different man from what he lets on to be. When the gambler ties to a man it's because there's something in him. I don't see much signs of him about the dude; but he may be Hair Trigger Tom for all that. If so, he *must* die."

Hawkins heard the latter part of this with some uneasiness.

"Is he giving it to him straight as he thinks it, or is this a cold deck? Blamed if I wouldn't like to know who this gentleman is. Pluggy knows him, and yet he keeps that infernal false ring in his voice. Must be somebody that can't afford to be suspected, in case anybody comes strolling along and bears his bazoo. I'll try and have a peep at him, if it takes a leg off."

Thinking the thing over after this fashion Hawkins lost the greater part of Becker's reply, the only portion that he did hear being a fiercely growled:

"Ef I thort so, I'd lay fur ther slipp'ry ger-loot, first ov all. Mebbe it's straight yer' givin' ov it me, an' ef it are, what yer goin' ter do 'bout it?"

"If I can convince you that the man is Tom Carey—and, mind you, I'm not sure yet of it, myself—can I depend on you?"

For the first time the voice wavered; its owner expressed a hesitation and a doubt.

"Ef you kin show me things are on ther square betwixt you an' me, they kin go on az usual."

"All right; though it might be, on your account, better to open a different vein. I'll give you a hint, anyhow. Whether the man is Carey or not, he is in the road, and promises to be more so. By the way, do you know what became of him to-night?"

"Dropped outer ther back winder, an' skooted straight for Jake's. That's what I make outen it. He's thar now, anyhow."

"It may be so. He is not the man to throw off the disguise, once assumed, as long as there is a chance for it to prove of service. I tell you, Becker, if he really is Woburn, he is after the daughter, but if he is Carey, he is after the father, if not both. And either way he will be playing right against my hand."

"I ought ter know that, after all ther trouble fur nothin'—"

"Hush! None of that! This is not the place to talk over those things—or the others, either—but I've got to set you straight. If it's Hair Trigger Tom you have to handle, you've no child's play, but both hands full. I thought he was dead, though—I was sure of it. Confound it, man, I can't believe it yet!"

"Seein's b'lievin'. We'll strip his duds an' see what he looks in his bare skin."

"Yes, what was written there can never be rubbed out—curse him! It's a long story, if you go into it from end to end; but I can cut off both sides and give you the hub."

"Major Bang did see him in Tucson, as he says. At least he was there about that time, and went southward a little later. He dropped into two pretty good things about that time. First, he found a mine that just panned out rocks; and then he got a pard that could just reel them out. Carey had the luck and his partner had the money, and between them they made things fly. That's the way it worked for awhile, and then there was a woman came into the case, and a heap of trouble. The upshot of it was that Carey sold out his share in the claim to a third party—a thing he had sworn never to do—and jumped the country. At least he never came back. And now, if the dude is Hair Trigger Tom, if he ever meets that third man to know him, there will be lively times all around; all the lead and steel that you want to look at, unless he's changed more than most fellows do in that length of time."

"Wa'n't it a square deal, then, boss?"

"About as square as they generally make such things. What would grind him was the fact that there was a little compulsion in the matter. The arguments they used to make him sign that paper might have made a bigger saint than him swear hard."

"Eh! That so? Well, but pard, what's that got to do with you?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only, I was the third man!"

"By ther holies! I thort ez much. But don't it kinder strike yer you've bin givin' away a heap when yer lets me inside ov that game?"

"Not a bit of it, Pluggy. Not a bit of it. I know enough to hang you several times over, not counting on it that I am the equal of any man with the tools; and have several friends of your own stripe, who shoot as I wink. You can't and you daren't hurt me."

"But, I've given you enough for an inside pointer, to show you just where I stand. If the fellow is what he seems, a Boston dude—you've done enough. He will be off in the first coach if you just send him word that you are laying for him. If it's Tom Carey, and you choose to take the risks, I'll ante up a thousand to get you over the mountain if you happen to send him over the range."

"Good ernuf! You kin put it right thar, on that. Ef he stays he'll go a-climbin', an' you kin git yer ducats ready. That's what yer met me hyar fur, are it?"

"Something of that kind. I want you to take him off my hands altogether. I've too much else on board to bother with him, just here and now; and I want you to begin proceedings at once. If we've struck the wrong man I'll pay you for your time when you quit the trail."

"All right; but don't yer furgit they've both spotted me. Ef I work slow it's acause I don't want two bad men ter double-team me. But yer won't hear from me ag'in till I bring in his scalp. Is that squar' ernuf? Hello! What's that?"

At that very moment Hart Hawkins was peering in cautiously through the little crevice by which the pencil of light escaped; but it was not he that had attracted the attention of the men within. It was the sudden, sharp report of a pistol at no very great distance, and in the direction of the Happy Home Hotel.

At the sound Hart Hawkins knew that it was time for him to get back; and he "got." Without the least noise he darted away at right angles to his former course, trusting that he would not be noticed, and not caring much if he was provided he could get so far away that he could not be recognized if they chanced to see him.

But there was little danger of that.

To Pluggy Becker the shot was just a chance one, such as was heard nearly every night at Bad Man's Bar, but to his companion it was something more.

"Stay here!" he shouted. "I'll post you if it's anything with fun in it; but I don't want you seen just now. Remember."

Then he rushed out, and almost as noiselessly as Hawkins, sped on his course; but this was straight toward the Happy Home.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE RACKET AT THE HAPPY HOME PROGRESSED.

LEONA had not intended to lose consciousness at once, when she laid down, but she reckoned without the remembrance of the excitement and fatigues of the day. It was just an even chance whether they would keep her wide awake or send her very sound asleep; and by chance they did the latter, in spite of the trains of thought that she was anxious to follow. She did not hear the old gentleman softly open the door to look in, nor did she know that he was roaming around camp, under the guidance of the governor. When he returned he looked in again, but still she slept.

The spice of adventure evidently had acted as a tonic, for Sidney Darelle's nerves were steady enough now, and he rolled into bed without hesitation, and sunk into solid slumber without delay. After that some little time passed in peace and quietness.

Then Miss Leona awoke suddenly, and found herself in unexpected danger.

Two men were at her bedside, and one of them had one hand upon her throat and the palm of the other over her mouth, to check any scream she might attempt to utter.

She did not intend to scream, however.

The first thing she thought of was Fairy Fanny's warning. Then her wits came back to her more clearly, and she listened to catch the low whispers that she could hear.

"Curses on it!" mumbled one.

"Here's a bad go. We've got into the wrong room. If we choke off the wind for good there will be a merry little blazes raised about it; and if we don't, I guess she's got lungs enough to raise the top of the building. I can feel her begin to squirm. What shall we do?"

"Hold her just that way till she don't squirm, an' then we'll go onter the job. Dog-gone yer fool head, how did yer come ter git in hyar?"

"Dry up! thar's something going on next door. 'Pears to me thar's more than us nosing 'round here. Wonder if they've nit the wrong room too?"

"You bet! Drop that an' puckachee. Thar's Satan ter pay an' no hot pitch. You hear that?"

The two villains were as cool as cucumbers; but they had no notion of remaining to fight it

out after what they heard. First, there was a low, gruff exclamation of surprise, distinctly audible through the thin partition that separated them from Sidney Darelle's room. Then the hasty shuffling of muffled feet; and a moment later a jingle of breaking glass, followed by a single pistol-shot that sounded on the outside.

"Not just so easy to do, eh?" said the first speaker, in his excitement his whisper rising into audible acuteness. "Shut the door and hold on. They will be swarming through the house now, and the fellow next door is hanging out of the window. We are in for a shooting frolic, and no mistake."

"That's solid. Don't hurt ther gal, but keep a stopper on till we see a chance ter slope."

"Here's your chance now," interrupted the other. "It's a wrinkle, and if it don't work we can't be any worse off. Be ready for a bolt when the crowd comes!"

Flinging Leona back, he threw up the window at the foot of the bed, and shouting, "Thar they go! thar they go!" fired several shots as fast as he could work thumb and finger.

His comrade "caught on" to the dodge at once.

"This hyar way they go! Out an' after 'em! Hurray, boys! hyar's fur a frolic. Git yer ropes ready an' kim on!"

And out of the window the two sprang, shooting as they went, and apparently in hot pursuit of several flitting forms, for a moment dimly seen as they were vanishing in the darkness.

When the whole house was aroused it was not very likely that Sidney Darelle could sleep. When about half the crowd, headed by Hoopnagle, with a lantern, burst into the room, they found him sitting up in bed, staring wildly around, while the open window showed where the intruders had made their exit.

"Vot vos der masser?" exclaimed Jacob, as he seized the old gentleman by the shoulder. "For vot you pees shootin' in mine house dot dime vor de night? Eh, py shiminy! I pleeves you vos have der shim-shams! Der vos nodings here."

"There's some more of them, then, in the same fix," gasped Darelle. "It is from Leona's room. What is it? oh, what is it? Help her, quick!"

He sprang hastily from his bed, drew on his pantaloons, and in hot haste dashed away for the next room, into which he burst, a moment after the two intruders had flung themselves out of the window.

"A light! a light!" he shouted. "Leona, are you here—are you hurt? Speak!"

A gasping gurgle from the bed, just as his hands fell upon the face of the girl, showed that she was still living, and when the Dutchman had brought his lantern and Darelle had anxiously examined her face he was reassured. She had been a little roughly handled, but no great harm done beyond the mental shock and a momentary semi-unconsciousness.

"Nothing—nothing to speak of," she managed to articulate. The villains! Gone! That way!"

Leona pointed to the open window.

"Mine crashus!" ejaculated Jacob. "Pees der vinders all open? Dey moost shoost shpring oop mit de'r own acgoord. Put vor vhy den doos dey shoot? Nefer vos dey sooch goings on mit my house."

"Gosh! I should hope not!" said the voice of Tommy Tough, his familiar expletive coming first. "But I reckon you'd better be seein' ef they all got away. Thar war shootin' ernuf ter salivate a few. It ain't ther squar' thing, neither, ter be lettin' 'em squirm 'round out thar in their miz'ry ef any ov 'em are winged. Jest gimme an ax an' I'll go out an' knock 'em in ther head. I know thar's a few thar, fur I heered 'em a groanin'."

There was a good deal more interest about persons that were hurt than about those who were not, and the suggestion of the young man from Red Bend, whether or not it was intended to effect the purpose, enabled Sidney Darelle, who had recovered his wits to all intents and purposes, to clear the room.

Then he turned to his daughter, who was lying back in an exhausted condition.

"What was it my dear, what was it? I do not understand yet. Who was in my room—who visited yours? And what was their object? Is the whole house a den of thieves?"

"I think not. They seemed to be more afraid of the house than of us; and the trouble in your room saved me, and frightened away the scoundrels in mine. And the strangest part was that they seemed to be there by mistake. Their surprise at finding me was as great as mine at finding them. They were, I think, after you. You see it is just as I have told you all along. Every step that we take here is marked with danger. Be wise and retreat before it is too late. I had already been warned that both you and I were in great danger, and from different sources. This proves it. First, the road-agents, who seemed to have known of your coming—and who can tell if not of your object? And now, these midnight assassins! Sidney Darelle, are you mad?"

She flamed up as she drew out her article of

indictment, darting the question at him like an angry sword-thrust.

He received it unmoved.

"Ah! yes, yes. It is amusing, almost. Both in danger. Hum! Providence—with a little outside assistance—seems to be watching over us. My experience was something like yours. Wakened out of a sound sleep by a man bending over my bed I made an effort to cry out."

"At that he darted away, and out through the window, by which he had doubtless entered. As he went some one came rushing in, and past my bed. From the window he fired one shot, and then leaped out. Well, our fces have opened the attack promptly; now, who could my friend have been? Strange that he has not announced himself yet. Perhaps it was Governor Shaw. I know no one else who might have had an eye in this direction, or would be apt to come so gallantly to the rescue."

While he was speaking there came a rap at the door.

"Mr. Darelle, Mr. Darelle! It is I—Shaw. Can I be of any further use to you? I hope there is no harm done. Jacob has assured me there was not."

"Nothing, nothing, beyond a scare for Leona. Go on to my room. I will be with you in a moment. Have they taken the ruffians?"

"Only one of them, that I just handed over to a committee of the boys. I am not certain that they will not hang him if I leave him with them too long; but I had to see how it had fared with you and your daughter. I will wait for you then. This needs explanation."

Darelle went to the window, from which he took a long look before closing and fastening it. Then he said good-night, and went over to Egbert Shaw.

That gentleman was waiting for him.

"See here, Mr. Darelle, at the risk of a rebuff, and a request to mind my own business, I am going to talk serious to you, and offer my assistance. All this that has happened to-day shows me that you are a marked man. There are desperate men on your trail; and not alone for your money. Can't you tell me what is behind it all? Or, at least, enough to enable me to protect you? A man like you, alone at Bad Man's Bar in danger every moment, as you can see, and though I could save you from any open attack for the purpose of robbery there are some things that one must know about before they can guard against. What is it?"

"Thanks, thanks, a thousand thanks. I—I think I have been followed."

"Followed? By whom, and from where?"

"By cut-throats, by desperadoes, whom I thought I had thrown from my trail far to the East. There is wealth against me, money in pursuit of me, thousands to give for my life before I can achieve the object of my journey. I have wealth but I cannot strike back in that way, and the law is powerless, even if I had the convincing evidence that it is next to impossible to obtain."

"But your object? You have not yet explained that. Is it worth the risk and labor? With your wealth, it must be something very important that would lead you into these dangers."

"It is, it is. My son, whom I too long neglected and allowed to go his own way until he could sow his crop of wild oats—my son's interests and perhaps his life are at stake. And it may be that even now he is no longer living. I am searching for him, if living, to put a million more into his hands—a legacy that will lapse, and be lost to us all if I do not find him."

"Surely you go about it strangely. You might not find him for a million years. Why not intrust the search to those better qualified to carry it out? Give them the name, description, and all the points you have. This secret way of yours will only end in failure."

"Do you not see? He must not be suspected. Oh, it would never do to leave a plain trail back from the mines to his millions. Alas, I have heard but too clearly the sort of life he led after coming here. No one else knew him in the guise he had assumed, no one else ever would; but a father's heart never can be deceived. I recognized the description, and now I want to find him; to snatch him from this life of dissipation, and even crime; and lead him back to civilization, reformation and wealth. If he be living I am on his trail; if dead—I will avenge him. Those are the reasons I am doing the work myself, and have been withholding my confidence from even you. Pardon me for having done the latter. You are a stranger, and though Leona pleaded for you, yet I felt that I must know more of you before I unvalued my heart and purpose. Besides your kindness, I have other reasons to trust you. In the little time I have been here I have been making inquiries. I know, now, that I can; and I have opened up my whole heart accordingly."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks for your confidence, Mr. Darelle. But your son? You have not yet mentioned the name by which he is known. For whom, now, are you searching?"

"Ah, yes, I forgot. A dozen names he has had, but one last one under which he is best

known, I will search for him by—Carey—Tom Carey—Hair Trigger Tom, of Red Bend."

The surprise of the governor was momentarily visible in his face.

"Tom Carey—Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend—though I know nothing of his hailing from our sister burg—are you sure that you are making no mistake—that you would recognize your son if you were to see him?"

"Trust a father's eyes for that."

"How many years since he left you?"

"Ten."

"And you are sure that Tom Carey was or is your son?"

"Very sure!"

"And yet there is a rumor that Hair Trigger Tom is in this camp now. Nay, more. If it be correct, you have seen him dozens of times over. In fact, you came with him. The man whom good judges pronounce to be Carey is this self-same Woburn—the young man from Boston who was the center of the little disturbance at Charley Shiffler's."

"Wrong, wrong, all wrong. He is not my son; that man is simply what he professes to be. Do you think I have not watched him?"

"How then did he get away from that ruffian to-night? No ordinary man could have done the trick so neatly."

"I do not know; I thought perhaps you helped him. I am only sure of what I say."

Then Darelle's cough, which had not troubled him during the excitement, came back, and Governor Shaw, fairly puzzled by what he had heard, sat in silence while the old gentleman was racked and shaken.

CHAPTER XI.

A LIVELY CORPSE.

HART HAWKINS had a fair start on the occupants of the cabin, and made a rapid run for the Happy Home. As he came up the two men who had leaped from Leona's window were just disappearing among some shanties that lay fifty yards away.

As it was not his circus, so far as he knew, he did not attempt to follow, knowing that the chances of being able to overtake them were very slender anyhow. He was proceeding more leisurely toward the house, wondering what the racket might be, when some one dashed up, a revolver in his hand.

Just as promptly Mr. Hawkins had him covered; but for the present he only drew his thumb back, leaving his finger uncrooked.

Very fortunate was it that he did so, since, on the click, the other spoke:

"That you, Hart?"

"Good glory, yes! What in creation, Sam, are you doing out here? Who's been tramping on your toes hard enough to set you on the war-path?"

"Hush! Take kiver, an' you kin spread yer lay-out an' give me a chance to talk. Reckon no one saw you come?"

"Don't care if they did. Come along, though, if you haven't any more blood in your eye. It's a blazing good thing there weren't two of you. It's part of my religion never to shoot at one man until he develops his theory; but for two, that came at me the way you did, I'd have gone for them, red-hot. Pity! Thought I saw a chance for fun. What have you been doing with that revolver?"

He knew Sam too well to really expect an answer, but he had to talk—the situation would have brought questions out of a wagon-tongue and made a store-box speak.

As they entered the Happy Home quietly and drifted with the rush, they reached their room without question or interruption. Then Loftus opened his budget.

"I war hyar, yer see, an' heard 'em in ther next room after ther ole man; an' jest chipped. Must 'a' bin a gang. Some ov 'em after ther leetle woman. 'Pears like a permisc'us mix. You'll find one salted, jest whar I dropped him, an' mebbe that'll show who's on it."

"You heard them? Who the thunder is 'them?' And what sort of work is it, anyhow? I've been dropping to a kind of a game to-night, and I guess this is part of it. See anything of Eg. Shaw around since I left you?"

"He's out thar now," answered Sam briefly, pointing through the window from which he had been looking. "What's he done? Cussed ef he ain't pickin' up my corpse!"

"You're excited, old man. Never heard you talk quite so free as you have been doing this evening. Let's go out again and look at the body. It won't do to be sitting round here like a pair of humps on a log. They'll begin to suspect we had a hand in it, and that's the last thing I want 'em to do. I'm going to close up my box, pack my kit, and run another sort of game for a bit. I think maybe I see money in it; and there's not much on cards with the gang of pikers that holds out at Diamond Charley's."

"Go slow, pard! They's a bettin' crowd thar, ef yer hit 'em in ther right sign. They was off a little ter-night, on ercount ov ther sudden death ov Bob Bailey; but they'll come 'round. By to-morrer you'll see 'em ready ter stack up

chips fur all they's wu'th. Stick ter yer game, pard, an' don't throw away good money foolin' 'round Eg. Shaw."

"Ah, yes; but methinks I see something better in the air. I'll let you into it when I start to build my hand. Hist! How's that? Ears open and mouth shut. We won't go out just yet. There seems to be something going on next door."

The two had been speaking in a low tone, so that when Shaw entered the room of Sidney Darelle he did not hear even the faint murmur of voices that might have warned him. The conversation given in the preceding chapter was for the most part, pitched in a low key, yet the listeners got the most of it. It was undignified, mean looking, and all that; but the two had little compunction or shame, and heard with an intent to profit for everything that was in it.

There was only a little more than has been narrated. The cough shook the old gentleman, and between the spells his voice sunk to a husky whisper.

"There," he said, finally. "I have given you—ough!—the outline of my story, and to-night I have not the breath to say more. Tomorrow I will—ough—tell you something of our plans for the future; and you, perhaps, by that time, may be able to suggest something. Pardon me if I say good-night. I must look in on Leona again; and then try to get some rest."

"I understand, and will not linger. Are you sure you are willing to stay alone? If you wish company—though to be sure, there is no further danger with one of the villains dead and the other a prisoner—I am at your service."

"Ah! one dead, another a prisoner! You said something of this before but in my excitement—ough—I did not fairly understand you. Perhaps it would be best if I were to examine them. It is possible that I could identify them."

"Just as you choose. But I would not trouble myself about it before morning. They will keep."

Darelle coughed, coincided, and said good-night, the governor taking his departure, much to the relief of Hart, who was anxious to get out but did not want to miss any of the conversation, unimportant though it was.

He could not follow at once; but the delay was only momentary, since the old gentleman followed Shaw, entering Leona's room, which gave them a chance to slip out quietly and make their way out of the door at the other end of the narrow hall. If their tread was stealthy, and their actions suspicious, there was no one to watch and comment. Every one was gathered in the bar-room, when there was a confused medley of talk going on, a goodly share of it centering around Tommy Tough, who above all was talking in an aggrieved voice.

"Why, you know how 'tis yerselves—gosh! Wa'n't I thar when Jake brung ther lantern; an' didn't I say I heard 'em a-groanin', an' ax fur an ax ter knock 'em in ther head; an' wa'n't I fust man out, an' when I cotched hold ov Eg. Shaw by mistake along ov him a-bendin' over ther corpus, didn't he jest knock me end over end world 'thout end an' say, thar's yer burglar? An's that any reason fur puttin' on a tight necktie an' sottin' up a bucket fur me ter kick at; Eg. Shaw sed he hed it in fur me; an' 'tain't likely he'd be worryin' much ef he hed made a mistake. Gosh, no. But bring him hyer, bring 'em all hyer, an' see ef it 'tain't jest ez I say."

Tommy had been in considerable danger, the nature of which his remarks explain; and he wasn't altogether out of it yet. There was a rope festooned around his neck, and three or four of the hard citizens of the Bar were ready to pull on it.

As the governor had remarked, there was a right smart chance for a hanging-bee, and he had evidently forgotten all about it, as he did not put in an appearance.

Hawkins came up quietly and looked sharply at the young fellow, a smile quickly spreading over his face.

"Hello! What dizzy nonsense is this? Let up on it, I say, till we can find out a little more. Why, this is Tommy Tough, from Red Bend, and he wouldn't hurt a flea. There's been some mistake about this, sure. You hear me?"

"An' who in blazes be you? Mebbe 'yer' a sidepard of hissen? Blamed ef yer b'longs round hyar. Go fur him, boys, an' see what he's made ov."

The most prominent of the hard citizens growled out this appeal. If he hadn't been holding on to Tommy, he would probably have acted himself.

Fortunately for the little gambler, if the words were intended to launch the crowd at him, they also put him on his guard.

With a motion rapid as light his hands disappeared and reappeared, only now they each held a derringer.

"Easy, my noble lords! Don't bite till you consider exactly how much you are competent to chew. I'm not altogether a stranger here, and if you'll come my way, you will find where I live. I arrived from Red Bend, via Rat Trap, myself, to-day. I am stopping at the Happy

Home, and dealt farn as long as I could get a better at Charley Shiffler's, this evening. I left there some ten minutes ago, as Charley will be happy to tell you if you ask him; and Hoopnagle knows me from A to Ampersand, and will tell you all about me. That much as explanation of who I am. If you're not satisfied, Brother Butcher, why, just come for me. There will be the most interesting little circus that Bad Luck ever saw; and she's seen some lively ones, I ain't a-doubting. I've been here before."

There were some men there who appeared to be "hot" over the attempted outrage, but as yet there was no general uprising of the camp, or the bluff might not have been altogether a safe one. His recognition of Bill Butcher showed that he was not altogether a stranger, and his references were so first-class that it was hardly necessary to hunt them up, while what he said about Tommy Tough deepened the impression in the minds of several outsiders that the story the young man told was true. They remembered his grim jest, or ridiculous earnest, about the ax, and came forward.

Tommy, himself, grew more and more unconcerned. He leaned back with his eyes fixed on nothing particular, and unless Hawkins was very much mistaken whispered softly a few words that were intended only for him:

"Never mind me, pard. I kin make ther rifle. But, foller Eg. Shaw ef yer wants ter git at ther bottom ov ther shenanigen. Gosh, yes!"

Hart Hawkins started at the advice. It chimed in with an idea of his own, yet it was easier given than taken. Shaw had disappeared, and it probably would not be easy to get again on his track. Besides, there was a corpse, that had been carried into one of the little pigeon-holes of rooms of which the Happy Home boasted. He wanted to see it, first; and as the crowd, from the talk that was going on, had no use for him, and were discussing Tom Tough in a calm, business-like manner, there was no reason why he should not go to look.

He did so, under the guidance of Jacob himself, whom he caught at the other end of the room.

The result was a surprise.

There were enough traces of blood to show that it had been there; but now, the body had disappeared.

"That's right. Fool around Tommy Tough, who is next door to an idiot, and chuck the corpse into a dark hole, for his pards to come and carry away. Say, what did he look like? Did any one really know him?"

"He vas 'ein stranger in der camp, I see's dot midt mine own eyes. Den who would pe foolin' roundt mit him when ter poys shpot anypodd dey don't know. Dey gives demselves away der fust dings."

"That's it, prezactly. It was just a case when you wanted to keep your eyes open a little, to rake in the chances. If somebody had been watching there might have been a show to get at the gang that was in it. I tell you, gentlemen," turning to the eager spectators who were crowding up to look at vacancy; "I tell you, there is a gang. Leastwise, somebody was in it with the corpus; and that somebody belongs at the Bar. Else why go to the risk of getting the body away? Somebody was afraid it might be recognized as a pard of his, and that 'somebody is a man of nerve. It's not my say so, perhaps, and maybe I'm a fool for putting a little chip in on this game; but if you want to find out something big just get to the bottom of this thing, and scratch out who toted him off. That's all."

Hawkins had said enough to revive interest in the body—that was now missing—and turned away.

He found that Tommy Tough had been tacitly acquitted, since the tough citizens had transferred their attentions to the other room.

"Young man, hadn't you better slope?" was his question, as he was about to pay the lamb from Red Bend.

"I b'long hyer, an' dassn't fur fear they'll s'pect me ag'in. But, Mr. Hawkins, ain't you a-droppin' ter what I tole yer a bit ago? Ef some 'un like you'd take hold, it might be a savin' ov my neck; an' I'm cl'ar anxious ter know what war goin' on ez raised all this racket. And another thing: I ain't jest so sure that gerloot war dead. They took Eg. Shaw's word fur it, an' mebbe ther corpse eloped itself. They's men thar ez would trail a gopher through a chaparral, an' they's all afeared ter foller 'long o' thinkin' they'll find too much. Now, dry up an' sherry, er you'll hev 'em comin' back at me."

"You're about right, Tommy; I never saw that you could play cards worth a cent; but I must say you have a head on you for some other things; though why you should be telling me all this ain't so plain."

Tommy grinned and winked.

"Mebbe thar ain't a lady in ther case; an' when she am, you can count on Hart Hawkins takin' an eentrest. You an' me may run pards in this thing yit. Say," and his voice sunk into the thinnest of whispers, "thar's big money agoin'; try an' find out who's the old man. Oh, glory!"

The cause of his exclamation was evident if the reason was not.

In spite of all the noise and confusion, one denizen of the house had never made his appearance; though up to the present time his absence had been overlooked.

Now he entered; his clothing somewhat disarranged, as though hastily donned, and winking and blinking at the light.

"Aw, weally. It appears, aw, as though something desp'wate was going on. Can, aw, any one tell me what, aw, is weally the matter?"

And almost at the same moment Pluggy Becker came through the outside door from the street. At the sound of Wellington Woburn's familiar tones, his hand dropped instantly to his pistol, and he sprung forward. In spite of the circumstances of time and place, he just then meant business. No man should get away from him after the fashion that the dude had done at Charley Shiffler's without hearing an afterclap.

CHAPTER XII.

UNCLE DAN'L PLACES HIS MAN.

"HYAR's what's ther matter!" rumbled Becker, as he strode toward the dude.

"You're ther galoot, ther no 'count fraud, ez tried ter let me inter a hole down ter Diamond Charley's. Draw'd when I war playin' fun—draw'd on me, yer own pard ter Uncle Dan'l's fiddle, an' when I war lookin' ter see yer chip at me boot-heel, yer held straight fur me brain-box. Waugh! I'm after yer now, an' no mistake."

Becker's address was certainly forcible enough in delivery to terrify a tenderfoot who was new to such things, especially after the wearing sort of a day that Wellington Woburn had passed through. At the same time an old hand would know that the rough would not be likely to shoot in cold blood if no offer of resistance was made.

When both parties were sober there had to be an introductory overture of sufficient length to satisfy Judge Lynch.

And without a doubt Pluggy Becker had not been hitting the vial very hard.

After the conversation that Hart Hawkins had overheard the little gambler looked as from an inside view; and he fancied that the attack was more a test than anything else; though if it should turn out that the dude was Tom Carey, and he left an opening, Becker would attempt to get away with him.

Another man had another idea.

"Say, this hyer's part ov ther same game, an' ef you ain't takin' a pointer when yer gits it, I be. He's a-raisin' a racket ter keep ther crowd hyer while ther gerloot ez war in thar gits clean away. Mebbe they won't miss me now; but I'm a-goin', anyhow. I'll see yer later!"

Tommy did not wait to see the upshot of the affair, but quietly slid out, leaving Hawkins to wonder somewhat why the young man seemed so bent on forcing his confidences on him.

Meantime the dude was watching Pluggy as though horror-struck. He made no movement for a weapon; and as far as could be seen he had none to draw.

Neither did he attempt to retreat.

He simply stood staring into the threatening muzzle.

"Ain't yer got nothin' ter say? I'm allowin' that yer' a ding-blasted fool; but, fool er no fool, when a man plays off, an' then gits a chance ter crawl over me when I'm a-trustin' ov him, he jest hez ter walk up to ther capt'n's orfiss an' settle. Ef yer' sich a mighty chief with ther sixes, out with yer weepins an' shoot. Ef not, then chew sand an' eat dirt, an' I'll let yer crawl off ter pack yer trunk. Thar's on'y one ov us two kin stay in camp alive. Your chip, now; say su'thin', durned quick, er I'll rake the stakes!"

"But, aw, my deah fellow, I—aw—don't shoot. I—I—don't wahn't to. It's—it's wicked. And I—aw—assure you I nevaw took advantage of you in any way. You insisted I should dawnce, and—aw—I dawnced. Faw the west I—aw—simply—when you—aw—became exhilarated—wetired. Allow me the pwivilege now."

"That depends on how far ye'r goin'. Jest flop down on yer marrer-bones, ax my parding, swear ye'll leave camp to-morrer, an' you kin go ter bed an' stay thar tell ther stage starts. Ef not—waugh! Ther circus goes on."

Mr. Woburn clasped his hands.

"The—aw—circus! Does it hurt much?"

"An' that's the kind or cattle theret kims in hyar from ther East ter tromp on our toes!"

Becker was beginning to despise his adversary once more. He turned somewhat to his chuckling audience, and waved his hand past Woburn with a contemptuous gesture.

He waved it just a little too far. It had a certain momentum, being carried ahead by the heavy revolver that it held; and before he knew it, there was an act in the circus not set down in the bills or drawn up by him.

Wellington Woburn did not even crouch, but, as if propelled by some suddenly released spring, shot forward with one wonderful stride of his thin, long legs.

Becker's weapon was a disadvantage just then. He was holding on to it instead of trying to hold

on to the dude, who gripped him, twisted him over his hip, and then dropped him fairly on his head, with a whang that sent a cold chill through the most eager of the spectators.

"Aw—weally—gentlemen, I had to do it. I—aw—am not quarrelsome by nature, but I must protect myself. What—aw—will you have to take?"

"Better wait till you've settled with Pluggy," shouted a warning voice. "When he gets up, he'd drive one inter yer back soon ez inter yer buzzum. Ther circus ain't out yit, nohow."

"But there—aw—is an intermission of five minutes. I awssure you he cannot wecover, sufficiently to do damage, in less than that time. I know—aw. I speak by cawd."

"He's improvin', boyees; he's improvin'," continued the same voice. "An' tert think I bin a-travelin' with him right erlong, an' never knowed he were a chief. He downed Pluggy fair, an' fur a stranger showed sense and sand. You fellers may hold off, but Unkel Dan'l ain't losin' no chances fur good liker, free an' plenty ov it. Them ez are 'fraid ter drink with ther tenderhuff kin stay out, but by ther time they sees ther bigness ov ther persesh, methinks they'll fall in at ther tail end. Yes, that's so."

And then Uncle Daniel's fiddle gave a triumphant squeak, while the jolly old musician stepped briskly forward, his face shining with good-humor as he placed himself expectantly against the bar.

The ice once broken, thirst got the better of prudential considerations, and the crowd followed its leader, laughing, joking, expressing no particularly friendly feeling, but rather committing themselves to fair play.

Half a dozen sulked at one side, raising up the fallen champion, who was thoroughly stunned, though not seriously damaged. They even looked as though it would not take much coaxing to adopt the matter as their own, for as the glasses were adroitly strung along the bar half a dozen hands wandered toward as many pistols—and then wandered away again.

"Hyar's to us all, an' many more ov 'em," continued Uncle Daniel, as the spokesman of the occasion. "An' now, me noble dook, w'at yer goin' ter do when Pluggy gits up? Ther boys hyar likes ter see fun; an' they don't keer ter throw ther time away, even for free drinks. Ef ye'r goin' ter keep this think a-goin' on, well an' good. Ef not—you better git."

"But—aw—don't you see? Mister Becker—aw—has been pwaticing with a wewolver and weally is an expert. He wants me—aw—to play his game; and he hold—aw—all the advantages. It's not fahr; it weally is not fahr. If, now—aw—he came my way, I could—aw—make it weally interwesting—aw—I could indeed."

The dude did not seem at all at his ease. He eyed the little mob around the fallen chief in a suspicious way. It did not appear certain that he knew what he was saying when he uttered his boast; but rather that he was talking to keep his courage up.

Still, as he stayed, his words were taken with good-natured amusement by the men who had just been drinking at his expense. They were rather a worthless set anyhow, or their appetites would not have got the better of their curiosity.

"What's your way, eh?" quired Alligator Abe, ruffling suddenly up from where he had been assisting to restore his friend.

"Pluggy's good ernuff fur a hull drift full ov jest sech billy-doodles ez you be anyway you want ter take it—though I s'pect ef you seen him a-comin' fur you in earnest it'd take a lariat rope at each corner an' a picket-pin in ther center ter hole yer ter biz. He'll be thar in a holy minnit, an' all he's a askin' is how yer want him ter come. This hyar camp knows he's a squar', honest man, ez never puts in his work whar it don't b'long; but it might be satisfyin' to yer friends ef they knew yer said jest what yer wanted afore ther fun begun. Talk now, er travel."

"That's talk. Now ye'r shoutin'. Yes, that's so. It's goin' ter be more fun than fiddlin'. A jewel to the death, ef they don't quit sooner. Go fur him, Boston, on yer best hold. Peel an' sail in; I'll hole yer hat. Tell him what yer want, fur Abe means it, an' ther crowd 'll see fair play."

"Well—aw—I would sooner not; but—aw—if I must meet him again it should be—aw—with the naked hands. It is weally—aw—the only way to see who is the better man."

"Kerrect ag'in, me noble patron ov ther muses. Oh, ther' wa'n't no slouches about ther crowd ez stood off Kunnel Longhead. Abe, you just tell your pard ter shuck hisself ov his shootin'-irons an' git in hyar. Ther ball's open, an' ther floor free."

Alligator Abe went back to his principal, who was so silent that he couldn't help but be dangerous. Twice had he been foiled just when he was about to get in his work, and by this time he had forgotten all about the question of identity. He meant to kill the dude, anyway; and he preferred doing it in an open way if possible, so that the camp would not have an excuse to chip in, under lead of Judge Lynch. He knew he had enemies, and in the past he had made some pretty narrow escapes.

As Abe retired, Dutch Jake stepped up. The

gentleman from the Rhine had a long head on him, a very long head.

As long as they were not too noisy about it he had no objection to two gentlemen starting a fight inside; but he wanted the bulk of the business outside, or a responsible guarantee for his furniture, otherwise the chances were that more furniture would be broken than the extra pressure at the bar would amount to.

"Here, here, mine friends! Dis moost not on here! Git outside. Dere bes blenty moon-light. Den when you gits dry vrom der fight you coomes in an' kits blenty ov der choice whisky, prandy an' der elixer ov life. Put don't dry fer der break yer Uncle Yawcub oop. Say, you hear?"

"That's just the ticket, Jake. My man 'll go outside an' wait, an' ef Pluggy don't come out in good shape I'll hole 'Gator Abe pussonally responsible. Kim on, leetle man. Yer hev got yer Unkel Dan'l in th's racket an' he'll see it's did in style."

"But—aw—I didn't pwomise. I only—aw—said what I should pwefer—"

"Prefer be hang'd! You've got ter fight er run. He's a-comin' now."

And Uncle Daniel took the dude by the shoulder and hustled him along, very much as an irate parent leads his unwilling darling off to school, while the crowd came after, shouting, uncertain but careless whether the farce was to be followed by a tragedy.

And a little later Becker came, roaring.

His late overthrow, from which he had fairly recovered, counted for nothing. That was half surprise and the rest mistake. If there was anything he had prided himself on it was his muscle. His shooting was a matter of course; but the other was something he seldom had a chance to show off. Few men cared to stand up before his powerful rush after they had once seen a specimen of it.

"Now, Boston," whispered the fiddler, as they struck the street, "you know what keards yer got in yer hand. Ef they're strong ernuff, stay; but ef you've on'y bin drawin' ter a bob-tail flush, hyar's yer chance. Quit, and run like blazes."

"Thawnks; but I pwefer to remove my coat—aw—and stay."

Suiting the action to the word, Mr. Woburn calmly drew off his upper garment, which, with his hat, he handed to his self-constituted second.

"Yer a deceivin' cuss tell one sees yer in yer shirt-sleeves; but I kinder expected it, when yer began ter bloom so all ov er suddint, like a night-blossomin' serius. Hyar he are. Thar won't be no shakin' ov ther daddles, er that nonsense. Jest peel yer eye an' wade. It's a big contract and durn leetle profit. Yes, that's so."

The moon gave enough light for the spectators, but the least unscientific of the two probably had the advantage. The light was just the thing for a rough-and-tumble, but in a case where it was science against weight there was an ugly chance for accidents.

Mr. Woburn may have thought of that, but it gave him no apparent trouble. As Pluggy came rushing toward him he threw his hands up in a guard that was well calculated for attack or defense, and seemed to intend to meet the onset squarely.

Yet just as their hands almost touched there came a piercing scream from the nearest window, and immediately afterward the spiteful crack of a derringer. Something was going wrong inside.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOSTON'S BEST.

EVEN at that supreme moment, when the chief of the roughs was about to annihilate the young man from Boston, the peril of a woman took precedence with the sports of Bad Man's Bar. Every eye was turned toward the window, and Hart Hawkins led off the rush, followed by a goodly portion of the crowd, while the eyes of the rest were fixed curiously on the spot from which the noise seemed to have come.

It was something of a puzzle anyway. The rooms of both Fairy Fan and Miss Darelle were on the opposite side of the building. The cry should have come from one of those two ladies, and the question was as much what she was doing there as what had happened.

"A gum game clean through, jest as I thort it was," muttered the traveling fiddler. "An' I dassin't go back on my pard, fur I ondertook ter see him through. Mebbe it's a game ter get ther gang away while Pluggy takes his scalp. Look out fur a foul, Unkel Dan'l. Jewhilikens! gosh! ez Tommy Tough would say. Look at that!"

The two men came together with a rush, their fists moving—Becker's straight and heavy from the shoulder, while Woburn's flew around like the sails of a windmill, glancing here and there, without making much impression. In ten seconds he appeared to have lost his head altogether. He jumped, he twisted, he wiggled from this side to that, ducking his head at times like a school-boy in his first fight.

That sort of gymnastics could not last forever. He was doing no harm to any one but

himself, while Becker was growing cooler every instant as he began to see the chance to knock the dude out with the first straight blow that thoroughly connected.

Then—nobody saw exactly how it was done—Woburn shifted suddenly, skipped forward slinging out his left fist high up, making Becker's head fly sideways, in a mechanical dodge of the stroke, that got in lightly. At the same time, half turning, the dude stretched out until his right fist, shoulder and hip seemed to be almost in a line.

Pluggy went down like a log; and without waiting to see the result of his blow Wellington Woburn bounded away like a frightened deer, and disappeared around the corner of the building before Uncle Daniel had an opportunity to congratulate him on his signal victory, or the few of Becker's friends that had remained behind thought of cutting off his retreat.

Hart Hawkins had started a shade ahead of the rest, and got into the passage before even the worthy landlord. It seemed to him that he heard the swish of feminine apparel and heard the sudden but careful closing of a door. Outside of that there were no signs of any distressed female. He was not posted as to the assignments made, and stared around the empty room, perplexed to know which way to turn.

Hoopnagle found him there, and was inclined to go for him on sight.

"Oh, stow that, Yawcub. There's something wrong somewhere. You just knock at the doors of your lady lodgers, and see if the divinities are all present and accounted for. It seems blamed strange that the racket hasn't waked them up. But they may be ladies of nerve, or they may be too scared to raise their voices. You knock at the doors, and I'll yell, 'rats!'"

In a nervous, breathless sort of way Jacob did as he was bidden. The quickest plan would have been to have tried the doors at once; but the landlord hesitated at bursting in upon Miss Darelle, and was afraid of Miss Fanny's revolvers, which she had been known to use in a very reckless way, on several occasions.

It took some little pounding to get an answer from Leona; but eventually she answered, evidently being too sleepy to be scared.

Miss Fanny's door flew open at the first knock. She seemed to have heard the rapping, for she had thrown on a wrapper.

At the same time she had picked up a shooting-iron, the barrel of which promptly dropped on a level with Hoopnagle's breast.

"Here, you, what's the meaning of this? I've been listening to racket enough to-night to keep the Seven Sleepers awake. I won't stand it, Yawcub, I won't stand it. If there's any more of it I'll build me a hotel myself, and I'll run it, too. If I open shop I guess your one-horse sheshang won't be of much account. Clear out! Don't let me see you around here another holy little minute. And what do you mean coming to my room this time of night? Speak up, man, or my little friend here will begin to talk."

At these contradictory orders Hoopnagle stood aghast.

"Yaw, dot is all right. I only wants sure to pe dot you vos in de room."

"Where else would I be, you unsanctified old sinner? And what business of yours was it whether I was or not? I pay my bills, and calculate on getting the worth of my money."

The proprietor never knew before that the little woman had such a shrewish tongue, and he did not know *what* to say to bring her down from the towering passion he found her in, for which he acknowledged there was some excuse.

While he scratched his head, and wriggled uneasily under the lining of her pistol, as he tried to conjure up an explanation that she could understand, Hart Hawkins stepped forward. There were plenty of others in the distance, who had halted on seeing that for some reason there had been a false alarm. They could hear the conversation as it was being carried on, and had already begun to extract a good deal of fun out of it. For that reason the airy little gambler spoke in a tone so low that it sounded confidential.

"You really must excuse Yawcub. He heard a cry and rushed to the rescue. If his first thought was of you I must own that his taste is more creditable than I had imagin'd. There has been a good deal to excite the old man, and I am not surprised that he is a little off his base; but don't for a moment doubt his good intentions."

"Or yours," said Miss Fanny, with a low bow and a smile. "That is all well enough, but suppose you tell me what *has* been the matter."

In a few words, in which the previous trouble in the bedrooms of Darelle and his daughter, and the fracas between Pluggy Becker and the dude, were briefly alluded to, Hawkins told his story.

"And the fight! how did that come out?"

"Bless my soul if I know. I didn't wait to see. I'll go, and inquire, if you say; or I'll bet two to one, unsight and unseen, that one of the parties is a subject for the bone-yard. They were very earnest about the discussion when I left."

"And do you mean to tell me that you left

without finding out more about it than that? Good heavens, what interesting men they have here!"

"Your safety, miss, before everything."

"My safety! I guess I am able to provide for that myself!"

And she petulantly slammed the door in his face.

"Fooled all round; and yet I'll swear I heard the woman's scream. But who in the name of all creation is that? She's a daisy, for looks and tongue. It seems to me that I ought to have seen her face before; but I'll swear I never heard her voice. Not that voice. Perhaps some other voice. Ta, ta!"

And winding up by blowing a kiss in the direction of Miss Fanny's room he led the landlord away, listening to his explanation as they went along.

"So she's the phenomenon at the Quartz; and deals faro for the bad men of the Bar; Umph! If I hadn't lost my head in the other direction I suppose I would be clean gone. That's the way. It never rains but it pours; and it's just my luck never to catch a drop. We will see, now, what was the end of the scrapping match. If they kept up the clatter with the whoop they went in maybe they've waked up the governor again. Pluggy meant business, and Eg. Shaw would want to see that it was all according to Hoyle. I would anyhow if I was in such a swim."

He found a dozen different theories about the shot and cry; and as many more to account for Becker's being for the second time knocked out. He found also that the racket had brought not only Eg. Shaw, but Sidney Darelle to light. They were bending over the man.

"Gracious me—ough—but this is all very unprecedented, and—ough—is viewed with a heartlessness that is appalling. Cannot he be brought to my room for recovery? It looks as though the man was dangerously hurt."

"Oh, don't worry about Pluggy—he'll be right in a few seconds. He's coming now. When he was creased, at the Lay-out it knocked him dizzy like. If he had taken my advice and bunked in he would have been a heap better off. But that dude must be a wonderful man to get away with him twice in one evening. Are you sure that he has not been selling you as well as the rest of us? He must have some designs on you, and I would advise you to beware. Unless you know all about him take no risks."

"I—ough—know nothing at all about him. Do you really think? Ough! Till to-night I scarcely spoke to him, but after what you have told me I must be cautious. And this man. Now that he has such cause for venom against him, could he not be put on his trail, to discover his object and checkmate him. I—ough—would give a hundred—ough—to be sure."

"Not a half-bad idea. You can see him tomorrow, and try."

"To-night—ough—to-night! I never put off till to-morrow what can as well be done to-day. Let us take him to my room at once. I may be all wrong, and must know. If this should be Hair Trigger Tom, I have been woefully mistaken."

"It is fearfully late, and you are risking a great deal by your over-exertion; but—" seeing a shade pass over the brow of the old gentleman—"of course I shall be only too happy to help you."

The governor really was not happy at all. He would have preferred having first a little talk himself with Becker. As he could not just then think of anything further to say he gracefully yielded, the fact of being present at the interview being some compensation. So when the rough came to his senses he found that he had been taken altogether out of the hands of his more immediate admirers, and was being supported by two gentlemen whom he least of all expected to meet.

"Ye'r right, Eg. Shaw; he's a holy, howlin' terror, an' a man wants ter git up airy ter git ahead ov him. But I'll ketch him on ther turn yit; I'll hev his moldy old heart out, sure ez my name's Pluggy Becker, an' you kin see ef it weighs an ounce. I'll bring it to yer; I will—"

"Hush, hush! You are wild. The man protected himself a great deal better than, by his looks, any one supposed that he was able. That much is all right. But my friend here is struck with the fact that he seems to be here in disguise, and imagines he may have some plot against him. He wants to know more about him, and so do you; so I suggested that perhaps you would be willing to look the matter quietly up."

"And—ough—in the matter of compensation I can afford to be very liberal. I don't expect too much—ough—but if you can catch him off his guard and tell me what he looks like, then I would ask no more for the present. I have money, and my daughter—ough—is young and innocent. Both must be protected."

The governor looked queerly at the old gentleman, for the first time wondering if the wealth alluded to might not be a myth; while Becker, feeling more restraint than he could account for, said nothing, and waited for Shaw to give him a point.

"Do you think," he continued, his voice falling again to a whisper, "that he could be a

gambler, who has heard of my weakness and is trailing me down, hoping to catch me some time when in its worst stages? You see I am very frank with you. There are times when I imagine I can beat the world. I would not know it if my daughter did not tell me of it, and my cash-book did not show discrepancies when I come to my senses."

"Then you know for a fact," Egbert Shaw responded, while Darelle was coughing a little less vehemently than usual, "that you *can't* play cards for keeps. That knowledge of itself ought to save you half a million."

"Oh, at poker I can play the cards for what is in them; with honest men perhaps hold my own."

"Excuse me for saying it; but I feel an interest in you. You are a queer compound, and I confess I would like to see you play a few hands of bluff. I might know better than what to make of you."

"You shall, sir, you shall. What is to prevent your sitting down right now?"

"The hour."

"Hang the hour! I am as young as I ever was! Here are cards, I am amply supplied with coin. If you and your friend dare to encounter me there can be no opportunity like the present."

"Take him up, captain. I'm extry well heeled, ter-night, an' don't keer ter decide it right now. Yer know I'm a chief at sich matters."

"True, true," said the governor, softly. "I don't care if I do."

So, as the stars were climbing well on toward daybreak, the three drew up well together for the purpose of discovering whether Sidney Darelle knew how to play draw.

The question in the mind of the governor was, whether the fit was on him.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. BECKER GETS IN CLOVER.

THERE is no doubt but what Egbert Shaw would have been very willing to dispense with the presence of the fighting tough. He was not the sort of gentleman the governor was accustomed to having across the table from him. He did not usually carry sufficient coin to make it an object; and his manners were not of the most refined. He was, in addition, one of the best poker-players at the Bar when in playing shape. If he cooled down enough, and played for himself, Shaw knew that he would find his hands full to come out ahead.

He did cool down, too. After it was once settled that he was to trail down the young man he had been pleased to consider his enemy, and be well paid for doing it, he appeared to dismiss the whole subject from his mind, and fix his attention entirely upon the cards.

And it was strange what a change the mere touch of the pasteboards made in the appearance of the old gentleman. His fingers quivered more painfully than ever, and there was an eager glitter in his eyes as he looked at his two opponents.

"To-night—ough—we play with a limit, and it would be best for you gentlemen to fix it. Anyway, I will only play for an hour. Win or lose I stop then. I will keep control of myself. Name your figures, gentlemen."

He laid down the cards again, and placed his watch on the table, fronting him. Then, from his breast he drew out a pocketbook, and opening it laid it at his elbow. No wonder the road-agents had made such anxious inquiries after him, if they knew that such a treasure as that was afloat. The only wonder was that he had been able to bring it through with him so far.

It made Pluggy Becker's eyes twinkle and twitch as he saw the size of the pile, and it made him hink rather ruefully of his own little five hundred, with which he felt quite rich, only a few hours before. It was with a feeling of relief that he heard Egbert Shaw say:

"Oh, it's simply a little test of skill, my dear sir, which the weight of your purse makes it somewhat difficult to make. If we fix the ante small enough, and keep the bets in proportion to it, we may find out something. Make the ante a dollar and the limit say, a hundred. We can't well go less; and if we make it more we defeat our own object. What do you say, Becker?"

"I'm agreeable, ter 'most anything! You won't bust me up on ther fust deal, at that, an' I'll allers hev a sight fer my money, so I've a chance fur a liddle fun ef yer don't work too fast. I'm waitin'."

The governor in turn was astonished by the size of the buckskin that Becker produced, but he turned inquiringly to Darelle.

"For deal," said the old gentleman, pushing the pack into the center of the table; and the three cut in silence.

"Your jack has it—ough! ante," he continued, inspecting the cards shown by the other two; and Becker's face assumed a jubilant expression as he began to shuffle the cards.

The tough could not have dropped into a better thing if he had planned it, since the governor had no present intention of forcing the game, and it was no part of his policy that Pluggy should rise a loser if it could be avoided without too

great a sacrifice. Then he would have no excuse for forcing himself into the game at a different time and place, where there was more to be won.

There is no necessity to follow them step by step. Under the liberal limit it might have been possible to win or lose a great deal in the course of an hour, yet fortune was so far balanced that without much interference things ran fairly well to suit the governor. Becker was a hundred or so ahead, and Darelle as much or more to the good when Shaw called time.

"What yer want ter stop now fur?" asked Becker, coarsely, as Shaw threw his hand in the middle and pushed his chair back from the table. "It ain't daylight yit, an' we may ez well finish ther nigh' out."

"That don't go among gentlemen, Becker. I have been watching Mr. Darelle's watch, if you have not, and the hour is up. Come on now! The safest plan is to get you out of temptation. A little success is a t to turn your brain."

At the same time he gave an imperative gesture, that checked the grumbling remark that was on the lips of the other.

Sidney Darelle looked from the one to the other. There was no doubt but what he was willing, now, to go on. The watch had been forgotten, and he even did not seem at first to understand the action of the governor.

The few cold words called him to himself, and with the sigh of a man coming to his senses, he, too, pushed back his chair.

"Perhaps you are right, governor. You see that it is as I told you, I lose my senses at once over the card-table. I would have played straight on. Now, how is it, and about how do we quit?"

"You play a very strong game, if you were not quite so earnest; and if we had not fixed it beforehand, you might have fast scalped us. A limit takes half the science out of the game. As it is, you are the principal winner, and Becker has had a little streak that has put him somewhat ahead, though I think you would have slaughtered him in a hand or two more. If you can control your temper, I see no reason why you should fear to meet the average player; and I guess even the chiefs would find some trouble in getting away with your baggage. That's just an opinion, though; a few hands, such as we played this evening, can hardly show."

"No, no—ough! I was not at my best. Tomorrow night we may test the matter again. Your judgment may be worth a million to me, and I want to have it. I will expect you then."

"You may, if nothing turns up to prevent."

"But we must go somewhere else. My daughter might become aware of it, and she is terribly set."

"That is true, and this stuffy little room is hardly the pleasantest place in the world for a long sitting. I will call for you. There's the Lay-out, where we were this evening. We can find accommodations there; or at the Quartz. I might make up a little party of our representative men, if that is agreeable. If not—well, we can be alone at either place."

"Thanks, thanks. You are taking a world of trouble. A night-cap if you must go, then we will say good-night again. Strange, how something always swings us together. Perhaps, though, chance is tired of persecuting us. We ought to be able to sleep well."

The flask which Darelle produced had a marvelously good filling, from which none of them were ashamed to drink heartily. Then the two took their departure, stepping lightly and saying nothing till they got out of the building.

"A regular angel," whispered Becker, "can't play draw fur a cent, an' ther more he loses ther more he wants ter stack it up. Ef you're goin' ter hev ther pickin' ov him whar'll my sheer kim in at?"

"Don't be excited, Pluggy, I'll give you a chance to make a right good thing of it. You stick to the trailing, and stay out of the game. When we got to going fer blood and hair we would swamp you about the first deal. And I was glad to see you take the wink. Don't say anything about Hair Trigger Tom to the old gentleman. He's the very fellow that Darelle is after. There must be some mistake about it anyhow. I don't recognize him, his father don't; and all the idea has to stand on is the spouting of that wind-bag, Major Bang."

"But when he talks about a gerloot he means a heap. He picks 'em all out ez they comes, don't ver disremember."

"Well, he's made a mistake this time, anyhow, though I'll admit he is not what he seems. It takes a putty good man to get away with you, Becker; to tell the truth, I didn't think it could be done unless some one got the drop on you with the irons, and laid you cold. I want to know who he is as much as any one. It is pretty certain that he has not come here for nothing, and if he means to strike the old gent he may interfere, heavy."

There was a subdued but decided aroma of sulphur in the air, for though Becker was listening he was thinking; and the remembrance of how he had been handled by the dude brought the blasphemy to his lips in a choking stream.

"Unless he's after ther gal, blame dash him! But yer needn't keer fur him. I've got ter lay

him straight, er leave ther camp; you kin see that yerself. An' me bin foolin' round with 'er logger-headed buzzard like him! I'll find out who he is an' kerrel the ole man's rocks. Then—ef every grain ov sand down thar war a sep'rate gridiron, an' he war a-toastin' on 'em all, yer kin add it up an' it won't tetch wo't I've got in fur him. Oh, I'll break him all apart, soul and body. Ef I don't, kill me. I ain't fit ter live."

"You seem to take it hard, and it was rather tough. Be careful how you do your work, though. If any shadow from it falls on me I will have some men gunning for you, and you bet they won't give you any show till they down you. You began the racket on your own book, and carried it out to suit yourself. I've only showed you how it fell into my hand. Don't show up my way unless you have something to tell me. I've other fish in the pan to fry. Now, you can wagon on home. I needn't tell you not to be blowing about the little poker party to-night. If it gets out otherwise it makes no difference; but through you—thanks, it don't sound well. I'll have something to say myself."

"All right, boss; I sabbe. I'm dumb ez a clam."

The two men separated then, totally unconscious of the fact that from a window near by there was a watcher who had overheard nearly all of their conversation.

Hart Hawkins had got onto the trail of the governor at the time Pluggy Becker was being led away. He was shrewd enough to imagine that there was something up, and that he would learn little by intruding.

Accordingly, he kept awake, and even made an occasional scout. It wasn't very dignified, but when he was after points dignity didn't count. The partitions were not very thick in the Happy Home, and by running the risk of being discovered by some outsider, he might have even been able to follow the varying fortunes of the game.

As it was, when the trio quit, he had a fair idea of what had been the result of the hour's amusement. He even debated whether he should not follow the two in the hope of overhearing something of their plans.

"But it's getting too late in the night," he thought. "Some confounded early bird will be out. He'll never notice them—wickedness always does prosper—but if he saw me skipping around in the rear he would just blow me cold. Maybe they'll stop outside."

It was a fortunate hesitation, since he undoubtedly heard more by far than he would otherwise have done.

He looked after them with a curious grin on his face.

"So the old gentleman is an 'angel,' is he? So's the young lady. Thanks, governor; I'll drop the bank and keep an eye on both. Where there's a heap pile of rocks falling, it's queer if Hart Hawkins don't get a share."

CHAPTER XV.

MISS DARELLE HEARS THE NEWS.

IN spite of the hubbub, the excitement, and the good share of personal danger she had experienced both along the trail and after reaching the Happy Home, Leona had had a fair night's rest.

While the venerable Sidney Darelle had been playing the good Samaritan to Pluggy Becker, and afterward amusing him and the governor with the little game before mentioned, she had been calmly sleeping.

As a consequence, she arose the following morning feeling thoroughly refreshed, and went to her breakfast with an appetite like a young hawk.

En route she knocked at her father's door, and after several efforts aroused him enough to get his order to go, and never mind him. He would take his sleep out. As she knew nothing of the "draw" that had occupied the hours he should have been sleeping, she turned up her nose somewhat scornfully and sailed away.

At the table she found three persons already seated, the gentleman nearest to her being Hart Hawkins. The natty little fellow was as spruce and smiling as though he had not been up two-thirds of the night. He smiled formally, nodded his head, and then went on with his breakfast. If she wanted to ask any questions, the way was open; otherwise, he would not intrude.

She recognized him as the young man who had expressed such emphatic sentiments in regard to Mr. Shaw the evening before, and for the present had nothing to say, though from time to time she gave him a contemplative glance, which the little minister of chance noted without giving any sign. If he had spared eyes for any one else, he would have seen that Sam Loftus in his quiet way was staring at both; and that the third man—no other than Tommy Tough—was watching all three. If signs went for anything, he was amused at something, and once or twice opened his mouth as if to speak.

Hawkins happened at last to catch one of these efforts.

"Well, young man, what is it? I'm the easiest darling to get acquainted with that you ever saw; and I'm 'most dead for some one to

say something. I think I could even stand some doddering nonsense from you. Speak up and tell us all about it."

"Oh, I ain't nothin' ter say. I war jest thinkin' how Fairy Fan choked you an' Jake off last night. She's a hummer from 'way back, ain't she? Gosh, yes!"

"It was the reward of disinterested benevolence joined to a desire to explore an as yet unsolved mystery. There was a lady in the case, sure; but if she came out all right, and had no desire to have our valuable assistance, why—Barkis is willin'."

Miss Leona was listening, and showed her interest. She remembered now what had totally slipped her mind on rising, that she had been disturbed when she was too sleepy to ask for or comprehend the cause.

"I hope, miss—and you will pardon me for speaking, but an apology is needed—I hope that we gave you no alarm, and but little inconvenience. Yawcub felt it his duty to go the rounds and I went along to see that the thing was done decently and in order."

Miss Darelle drew back—and then as suddenly changed her mind.

"I remember something of the kind, but I have met with such outlandish adventures in these regions that nothing seems out of the way now. I thought perhaps it was the custom of the house to call the roll regularly at two o'clock in the morning to see that none of the guests were missing. What was the trouble?"

There was a bang as a chair fell to the floor. Sam Loftus, who had occupied it, made no movement to pick it up, but slouched out, a look of disgust on his face.

"Samuel is unfortunately somewhat hard of hearing," said Hart Hawkins, unblushingly. "If the rest of the house dropped behind him into never-come-back-again he would never hear the racket, but go straight on. He slept through it all, last night, like a little lamb, and wouldn't believe a word of it this morning, when I tried to tell him."

"But what did happen? That is, was there anything else after the little adventure of ours?"

"Oh, there was plenty. It would have taken a pint of morphine to keep me from hearing it—but then I'm not blessed with a guiltless conscience."

Miss Leona took no notice of what may have been a covert hint. She kept her eye on the mark.

"Was it, then, too dreadful to tell? Hardly. The town looks as lazy as ever, and I can see no ominous gatherings on the street corners."

She strained her little white neck in glancing out of the window at a vista of shanties, and here and there a man lounging down the straggling street.

"Lazy! You mustn't call the Bar lazy. You only see its denizens in their home of rest and recreation. But by night—oh, they are just as industrious—with the pasteboards, and shooting-irons, and such! Why, you know how it is yourself."

"But last night?" insisted Leona, with the pertinacity of a woman who scents a possible secret.

"Well, you must take it all in together. You see, previous to your affair the governor took your father and the young man who arrived in your train around to see the town, and the young man from Boston, after bucking the tiger and dancing to uncle Daniel's fiddle, got involved in a row with a local chief named Becker. Result, somebody shot from their pocket—presumably Mr. Woburn—and the local chief was laid out. When he came to his senses the other party had eloped, and Becker adjourned."

"Some little time after the racket here, at the Happy Home, the two came together once more, and were bent on death and destruction. The Dutchman objected to a row in the house and shoved them out into the street to settle their difficulty, as they agreed to do, with their fists."

"Then, when everybody was looking on with breathless eagerness, and the bets ten to one on Pluggy, from a window overlooking the scene came the crack of a derringer and the scream of a woman. That was what excited our worthy landlord. He first assured himself that you were safe, and then looked after the gentle mistress of the Quartz, who was very much there, and altogether safe. There's the whole story, illustrated with cuts."

"One of which is the result of the little controversy that was going on in the street. Is there to be a funeral to-day, or are the obsequies over?"

Miss Darelle could adopt the festive style herself. Hawkins went on, somewhat encouraged:

"As for that, Pluggy was laid out again, and the other fellow ran away. If he quits running Becker will probably decide that the third time is the charm, and try him again."

"And is that all?"

She was a witching little woman, and Hawkins was an admirer of the sex in general, and this portion of it in particular. He had a suspicion that he had better keep his knowledge to himself, yet he could at least put another spoke in Eg. Shaw's wheel. So he spoke:

"Pretty near the end now, if I must go all 'round the track. At the tail end came your father and Shaw, who sent the boys about their business, gathered up the wounded man, and spent the rest of the night playing poker with him in the old gentleman's room. But don't say that I told you. It may be only a guess, you know."

Leona uttered a little cry of distressed dismay.

"No, it is no guess, it is the scandalous, wicked, disgraceful truth. I should have known it. Yet how can I prevent it? Thanks for telling me, though I had to draw it out of you word by word. I don't wonder you hesitated to tell me all, but I had good reason to press you to the end. No wonder he does not care for breakfast. After such bouts he is generally deathly sick the next morning. I will go to him now, and see if he needs my attention."

The conversation thus came to a very sudden close, the young lady taking her departure without further ceremony. As she left the room, Hawkins, turning to the young man from Red Bend, said:

"Thanks, Tommy, for putting me on the trail to be agreeable; though, all the same, it appears to me I've given my little budget clean away. I don't wish to speak strongly, but I advise—simply advise—that the few words that have been said in your hearing should remain locked in the inner recesses of your heart. Should they ever be repeated by you I will be under the disagreeable necessity of taking your ears off close to your head, and cutting your tongue out just below the knees. You hear me warble?"

"Gosh, yes. I ain't sayin' a word. Wasn't I thar, a-peekin' in ther winder? Eg. Shaw ain't doin' much that Tommy Tough ain't keepin' an eye on. When a man talks ter me's though I war a dog I gen'rally go ter git even of it takes a leg. He sed he'd watch me, an' so I'm a-watchin' him fur all thet's in it. It's wuth it, too, ez you'll see when ther end ov ther circus hev arrove."

"You wouldn't like to tell me your little game?" Hart cautiously asked.

"I ain't no game 'cept ter show Eg. Shaw up jest ez he are. When I've did that I've a idea wholl leave ther camp, but I ain't a-sayin', not jist yet. Gosh, no."

"All right. Keep it to yourself, then, and when I need any information I'll bore you, and see what sort of a well I strike. Ta, ta. So long. I'll see you later."

Hawkins went out, and Tommy finished his meal, which had been sadly interrupted by the conversation detailed.

Probably Leona had found that her father's nerves had not been dangerously discomposed, as it was not over an hour later that, dressed in a neat walking-suit, she stepped out to view the town.

The newness of miners and mining-camps had worn off some time since, and as the Bar differed but little from other towns that she had seen, she felt reasonably at home.

The fresh morning air was a grand relief to the close, stuffy atmosphere of the Happy Home, and she had begun to enjoy it as she strode along with a light, springy step, when, almost at the outskirts of the town she came face to face with Egbert Shaw.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOVERNOR GETS ANOTHER POINTER.

THOUGH Shaw eyed the young lady sharply, he detected no traces of the excitement in which she had left the breakfast table; while, from her manner, he could not have guessed within a mile of the truth in regard to the amount of her knowledge. She met him very much as though he was an old acquaintance.

"Good-morning, Mr. Shaw. I am out in search of the picturesque. If I can't find that I'll be content with the true, beautiful and good."

"I would say, 'in other words, in self-contemplation,' did I not know that you would take it at a great deal less than the truth. Can I be of any service?"

"Yes—if you have any spare time. I must have my promenade, anyhow; but I am willing to take it under the guidance of an escort."

"For which duty I am but too proud to place myself at your service. There is but little of interest here to see, except, perhaps, the shafts; and I had hoped to show you them in company with your father. This morning it is rather late for the expedition, and the distance to travel a little too much for a comfortable stroll."

"Thank you. You need not make any excuses. I am hardly in costume for exploration, and as I have seen such places before my curiosity is not so overwhelming that I cannot wait. But I did think of scrambling up yonder, and taking in the town in its entirety."

She cast her eyes upward and over her shoulder, toward the heavily rising ground. It was possible to obtain a very good view of the Bar, if any one was sufficiently interested in the place to take the trouble.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to take the scramble with you. And you will

not find the way as rough as it appears from here."

They turned aside, at that, and went slowly onward and upward, following a footpath, until finally they came to where a narrow path led off around the side of the hill.

Into this they wandered, and before going any great distance reached the spot for which they started.

"Not a very brilliant prospect," laughed the governor, pointing downward at the straggling rows of board shanties, canvas-covered dug-outs and occasional buildings of more pretentious appearance.

"Not exactly a brilliant sight, but I assure you a brisk little town; and I don't know of a place in all this mining region where money invested pays better. If your father has any notion of putting money into mining it will be worth his while to examine around the Bar."

She faced him fairly.

"My father has not come here for the purpose of investment. If that was his intention, and he was simply a business man, nothing could have induced me to follow him here. I have already told you something of his errand, and I know that he has told you more. He is in search of my brother, of whom, or from whom we have not heard for years. There is a fortune back there waiting for the young man if he comes soon."

"And if not?"

"Then, well, perhaps it will come to me, if it is proved that he is dead, otherwise the life interest, until he appears, goes to another branch of the family. There is something strange about all the Darelles, and this will as I have heard of it—for I have never seen it—is just in keeping with what I have heard of old Noel Darelle."

The governor bowed his head and remained silent. He neither invited nor repelled confidence.

"No, it is not to aid in his search that I am here; but to protect him. You have had the opportunity twice, at least, to see his failing. He is a born gambler. He knows nothing of the tricks and traps of the trade, yet he imagines that he can fleece men who have made them the study of a lifetime. It is only in the direction of one game. It is not wickedness; it is insanity. He played cards as an amusement for years at his club, and as long as he was among gentlemen it made but little difference. He sometimes lost and sometimes won, and he could afford to lose a few thousands a year. It diverted his thoughts from his boy—perhaps made his feelings less hard."

"Then he fell among sharpers, though they had their social position too. There is no need to tell the whole story, which of course I understand only in outline. Enough that, between stocks and cards—and mostly with cards—they beggared him."

"For a time it was thought he would never recover from the blow. When he did it was to find that he was a part heir to Noel Darelle's estate; and that his boy, driven from home and outlawed had another and as large an interest. It was found, too, that though in other respects almost himself he was filled with the idea that he was possessed of a system by which he could win back the wealth he had lost."

"Like others partially insane he was cunning enough both to almost conceal his fancy, and to try the working of it cautiously. It is betting certain amounts at certain times—I hardly know how to explain it better. It is based on the theory of chance as he understands it. When he started from Frisco in search of my brother he would have come alone but I dared not let him. I discovered that he intended to test his theory, to practice it, on the way."

"He might as well set off for a lair of wild beasts, with nothing but a switch in his hands. He has over twenty thousand dollars about him now, and would lose that at a sitting. After that the fever—that burns but faintly at times—would be on him in full strength, and he would never leave until he was ruined. Say then, have I not a pleasant task to watch a lunatic such as he? And do I not need help? Is it any wonder that I looked to you as one who might bring aid and counsel? What heart have I for the search when I have this nearer labor, that is enough to break down stronger nerves than mine?"

She told her story without hesitation, but from the hard bitterness of her tones it was evident that she was deeply moved.

Egbert Shaw was watching her keenly while she spoke. There were few better judges of human nature than he was and he thought he saw that shame and anger at the danger and disgrace of her father weighed much more with her than the thought of her own personal danger, or any concern as to the result of the quest on which they had started. So far he progressed in his study. After that he was thinking rather of her wealth and beauty than trying to settle beyond a doubt her exact reasons for telling him all this. He did not know exactly how to answer, since he was just beginning to be uncertain exactly what his object was to be.

"You can't think how honored I feel by the trust which, of course, you know will not be abused. You can trust in me, to the fullest; and I am sure, since I have made the closer ac-

quaintance of your father, that I can help you a great deal. How long do you expect to remain here?"

"I cannot say. Until assured that we are or are not on a false scent."

"And how will you know?"

"If we are not, by the appearance of the man we believe to be my brother. In a week perhaps, certainly not later than two, he will be here, and then we shall know. Meantime if father can be prevented from becoming involved in the meshes of any insane gambling nets he will have time to decide on what is to be done if this last hope is a failure. I hope that we will start eastward. Once back among his old friends and companions the danger will be practically over. Will you help me?"

"My time and best efforts are at your disposal," responded Shaw, with his hand on his heart. "Since I know what it is you fear I know what to guard against; and I will aid you to the best of my power, which, at the Bar, I think you will find is not small. There is one thing, though, which you have scarcely touched upon. The attack by the road-agents may have been on speculation merely, though I am inclined to believe that your father was spotted by some of their scouts. But the attack last night—it was so bold, so daring, and so terribly persistent that I feel anxious for your safety. Do you know that if the gang have learned the inside facts in the case they are probably planning how to make at least a hundred thousand dollars out of it? It is possible, even that the moving spirits in the matter have followed you from the Atlantic. Those criminals have connecting links that complete a chain clear across the continent."

"Do you think so?" answered Leona, with a shiver.

"I know so, since I have already been largely instrumental in running one band down. So you see the difficulties of your task are doubled. You must not only protect your father, but look out for yourself. Did you have a fair view of either of the two men who attacked you last night? or do you think, even, that you would recognize their voices if you heard them again?"

"It was too dark in my room to distinguish anything but dim outlines; and they both spoke in whispers, their voices even then seeming to be disguised. There is nothing by which I could know them again. But remember: from what I heard they were there by mistake. If they can be believed, the theory which I see you have, falls to the ground."

"Unless they saw that they would be disturbed before they could carry out their plans, and spoke so in order to throw you off your guard for the future. These men are wiser than serpents; and more ravenous than wolves."

"And then there was a double attack, too. But they sha'n't drive me away from him! I will do my duty if the heavens fall, and if evil comes to me it may at least save him. Do not breathe to him what I have said unless the worst comes to me. Then tell him, and say that it is my warning from the grave."

She seemed so very much in earnest that even the governor was touched; and then was the ring of true feeling in his voice as he answered:

"Do not despair. The worst shall not come to the worst. Every man in Bad Man's Bar will prove your friend, and we will protect you if we have to rise *en masse*, and hunt them from their holes. If the Bar gets started it is in the race to stay, and you'll see strange fruit on every tree."

"Why don't the Bar start, then?" she exclaimed, passionately.

"Why wait until the last outrage has been committed? It is a burning disgrace on your camp that you not only cannot protect your roads for even a stone's throw beyond your limits, but that in the town itself there is nothing to depend on against lawless brigandage except your own revolvers."

"You forget that I have offered you mine, and I control a score besides. If you judge it necessary I will have an armed guard under your window. And you forget, too, that one of the brigands doubtless paid the penalty of the attempt with his life."

"What! Did they capture him? I had not heard. Where is the body? It might be recognized, and so furnish a clue."

"Unfortunately the corpse was cast aside while searching for the traces of the others, and by some means was spirited away, though there is little doubt but that it will be recovered. I should have given more explicit directions about the dead, but I was in too great haste to search for the living."

"I believe that I can trust you; and, unless my brother—of whom I really recollect so little that he almost seems a myth—should come, you are my only dependence. Strange that I should feel so when, a week ago, I had never seen you."

"So much the better, perhaps. Our friendships are apt to be most active when they start; and certainly we need all our strength now. But, pardon me, is it not time to return? Your father may become uneasy over your absence. I had no intention of inviting your confidence when I led you hither, so that I feel all the more proud at having it so freely bestowed."

"I know that you are worthy of the trust."
"I hope so; and time will surely tell. By the way, how did your father obtain this information on which he is acting?"

"That seems to be his secret, though why, I know not. He has not trusted me."

"I ask for a reason. I think he is on the wrong trail, if I unders and in which way his expectation looks. Others are mistaken, I know; and he may have been led into the same error. I cannot tell you more at present."

"One last question, Mr. Shaw. For some days we have been traveling with a strange-looking animal, all drawl and stutter. I have hardly given him a thought until very lately; but something has led me to suspect that he may be playing a part. You have seen him. Is Mistaw Wellington Woburn just what he seems?"

The governor laughed.

"Yes, I have seen him, and talked with him. I believe he's the genuine article; but he may hold a hand that is unsafe to bet against. Such men are sometimes like the fabulous singed cat—a great deal better than they look. I wouldn't play him altogether for a fool, myself, till I saw what he was worth. Some one else did, and got left, bad."

"Thanks. We will go, now. At least I feel relieved—a little more encouragement and I may have hope."

CHAPTER XVII.

THREE RUFFIANS AND A LADY IN THE CASE.

SHORTLY after Miss Darelle had started on her excursion a gentleman came softly to the breakfast-table and took his seat in the awkward way of one rather ill at ease.

The landlord, who honestly looked after his special customers because he intended to charge them two or three times as much as his everyday patrons, saw him sliding into his place, and sympathized with him on the spot. He simply made a mental memorandum to a charge fifty cents extra for being late to breakfast, and endeavored to put him under more cheerful conditions.

"Good morning, Mr. Woburn. Glad ter see you. Dos vos a fine morning ven you gits yer eyes vidt open. Dey tondt hafe such vedder pack East, py shimminy, no. Dake yer dimes mit der grub. Who make dis der Happy Home, shoost ven you vants it. So you tondt coom at all dot *macht nicht aus*. Shoost, ven you kits dare—*vade in*."

He stretched his hands over the table in a wave of blessing.

"Aw, thanks; but, aw, this morning, aw, don't fweel well. The, aw, dissipation of last night did not agree with me. Aw, have a wetched headache, and could hardly dwag myself down. Weally, it's dreadful."

Hoopnagle had exhausted his oratory already, and retired disgusted at the poor result.

"Py shimminy, I sharges him feefdy cents extra ag'in, deo dimes. Dot makes a tollar. Mebbe next dimes he hafe soon abbedites."

As this was only a mental announcement, it had no effect upon the unconscious object of his wrath, who toyed with the edibles, glanced apprehensively, from time to time, at doors and windows, and finally swept away at a rate that showed he was in haste.

Shortly afterward came the final installment, in the person of Sidney Darelle, who bustled in, in better shape and spirits than the Bar had yet seen him. He ate a hearty breakfast, joked with Jacob, inquired after Shaw, took a brisk turn up the street, and coming back rubbing his hands in pleasurable excitement, took a seat on the porch. Last night's dissipation had agreed with him; and the dangers of the preceding day appeared to be all forgotten.

After a spell of waiting, in which the time did not appear to hang heavily, Miss Leona appeared, with her escort; no traces of the late excitement in her face.

The governor met Darelle frankly, eyed him keenly, expressing pleasure at seeing him looking so well, and dropped naturally into a conversation about Bad Man's Bar, and the surrounding camps, Leona joining in. Time passed; they dined together; and the afternoon was well advanced before Egbert Shaw took his departure.

"A fine gentleman, a fine gentleman," muttered Darelle, looking after the receding form.

"A little too young for me to thoroughly fraternize with, but I can appreciate his worth. Do you like him, Leona?"

The "fine gentleman" had given rather more time to them than he had to spare, and before he had gone twenty yards accelerated his pace until it would have puzzled even Mr. Woburn to keep up with him, for the little distance it lasted, which was only to the edge of the camp, where he had a stable. Without any delay he let out a horse, and mounting, galloped away toward the Phenix Mine.

It was nearly nightfall when he came back.

He was riding at a more sedate gait, and was full of his own thoughts. He did not even notice a graceful figure and a handsome face loitering by the trail side, until the animal he bestrode called his attention in that direction by a momentary hesitation, and a slight turn of the ears.

Looking that way he saw Fairy Fan, the fair mistress of the Quartz.

"You didn't come near me to-day, so I drew a bow at a venture, and it seems I struck you the first clatter. What sort of a game are you up to now, Eg. Shaw?"

He drew in at the free-and-easy address, and first glancing around, dismounted leisurely.

"You're a very charming young lady, Fan: you have plenty of nerves, loads of good looks, and it's an honor as well as a profit to know you; but you are too everlasting curious. In the words of the sublime poet: It's none of your business."

"Whew! Something has gone wrong to put you in such a flaming bad humor. Any deaths among your immediate friends and acquaintances? See here, old man, I want to have a word of solid talk with you; and you may as well go into it with a little more exuberance of spirits."

"For Heaven's sake, if you must talk, talk fast and to the point! I've no time for fooling here with you. What is it?"

"Really, it seems to me I remember when you did not consider it lost time while you were making yourself agreeable to Fairy Fanny. I'm afraid if the good people of the Bar heard that speech, the half of them would think you were stark, staring crazy!"

"The whole of them, my dear—the whole of them. Half, perhaps, for talking that way; but the other half for saying anything to you at all. What's the matter, now? Don't the Quartz assay two figures to the ton—do you need any coin on the table? If so, you know it's ready, and no questions asked."

"Bosh! Haven't you had your dividends as regular as clock-work? And haven't I offered, time after time, to buy out your share and interest, provided your good-will went with the bargain? No, sir; I asked you what you were going to do, and you know what I mean well enough. I saw you prospecting around to-day with the young lady who came in on foot last night, and I understand you have already opened out at 'draw' with the old gentleman. I asked, and I ask it again, what are you going to do? Third time's the charm. Open up, or—jump the game."

"You must be mad to ask me such a question. What should I intend to do? The love of money is the root of all evil, and I want enough of the filthy to sprout a healthy old tree. I intend to go for money, of course."

"And is that all? Are you sure you have no idea of assuming another burden along with it? Because, if so—"

"Well?"

"I might be tempted to call your attention to the fact that you already have a wife, and the first of the full set of olive branches. You understand me now! Go for the old gentleman any way you choose for all the funds he may carry with him, but let the old gentleman's permanent fortune, and his daughter, alone. You will find them both mighty bad medicine, and don't you forget it!"

"Thanks for the warning, but it strikes me you are wonderfully disinterested—or would be, if you were walking anywhere within a mile of the truth. I know nothing of any Mrs. Shaw, or of any Miss Olive Branch, and I don't intend to. The less you know about them the better it will be for your soul's salvation, if you have any occasion at all for time to repent. You interfere if you dare, and face the consequences."

"I'm giving you warning, now. If it is necessary, the interference can come later on. Here it is again, straight as a string, and you'd better get hold of one end of it tight, if not both. You just win all the stamps you can off of Sidney Darelle, as long as you can rope him into draw, but let his daughter alone. I have other use for her. And I don't intend that she shall call her father a ruined man. Another thing. That hound, Pluggy Becker, is scouting around on a bad errand. If he harms that innocent, he'll have me to account to for the performance. I've use for him, too. If Becker is acting as one of your hounds, call him off, too."

"You'll take in the whole camp by-and-by, at that rate. Allow me to ask seriously if you mean all that. Are you really in earnest?"

"I do and am; perhaps I mean more too. I talk in the only way you can understand me. Be assured that it's business on my part, chuck up."

"Connected with a lunatic asylum, I suppose. I haven't time to answer your folderol; and you have made a threat which is something I never answer if there's a woman in the case. Drive ahead, and see whether you even have the chance to observe me wearing crape for the wife and kid aforesaid. I'm not a wicked man, you understand, but I take care of myself, tooth and nail. Now, good-by; I reckon this is only a bit of heathenish nonsense."

"Very well. I am in hopes that you might honor me with your confidence. If you were wise you would take what I say to you as straight. If you met me fair and square I might give a reason for what I have said."

"Blast your reasons! So long. I suppose I shall see you later."

"I don't know whether you will or not; if you don't you had better hunt me up and talk it over."

"Bah! I'm in a hurry. Look for us all around at the Quartz to-night."

They had been walking slowly side by side, he with his bridle-rein over his arm. Now he sprang into the saddle once more, leaving Miss Fanny to follow alone and at leisure.

She did not seem to be in much haste, and when the governor had disappeared around the bend in the hillside trail behind which lay hidden the Bar she seated herself by the roadside. She did not care to enter the camp too soon after Shaw; and she had some things in her mind to think over.

"I have warned him," she thought, "but will that do any good? He will go his own way, and I may as well lay my plans for a fight now I know too much, and not enough. I can be dangerous to him; and yet may not be able to either pull him down utterly, or to protect myself. And as for Mrs. Shaw—if she is still living it might not be altogether easy to produce her in a shape that was available. If I wasn't open and above-board from the word go I wouldn't have shown my hand; yet what use after giving myself away to that fool of a girl? She will betray me the very first time she gets into confidential talk with him. And I wouldn't doubt but that she has done it already. They weren't sitting up on the hillside all morning for nothing. I wonder what I had best do?"

Unconsciously she asked the question aloud. Miss Fan was not a very apt conspirator. From the way she had opened on the governor it was plain that at all times she preferred an open fight. Nevertheless, treachery or surprise had never yet overwhelmed her, since they were things she was constantly expecting; and a harsh voice at her elbow scarcely came as a shock, though she could not guess how its owner had stolen there without having been perceived.

"Come with me, my daisy, come with me. That's what you'd better do; an' that's what you'll hev ter do. You listenin' to me warble? An', I wouldn't! Hyar, pards, ketch ther tiger-cat! She wants ter scratch."

Tae grin behind the mask straightened out in haste, and the drawl left his lips. He was no slouch of a villain or he would not have been engaged in the work. He acted as promptly as a tiger, and before he had uttered the last word he was acting himself. He saw her hand darting to her breast, and knew that it was for a weapon; but as it came out he caught her wrist and shoulder, and twisted her back over his knee. "Put the gag on er you'll hev her screamin' fur all out-doors. Thar, that's comfer'ble. Now tote her away, afore some guy blasted fool comes erlong, an' hev ter hev his gullet slit ter keep his wind frum goin' out ther wrong way—fur us. You hear n.e, say?"

He spoke in sharp anger, for the two men at his back had not moved. Glancing at them he saw them staring straight forward, each with a pistol in his hand.

"What is it, eh?"

Fan's two wrists were transferred into the grasp of one hand, while his other hand jerked out a revolver as he caught the direction of their gaze, and wheeled accordingly.

"Weally! I am su'pwised!" answered a mincing voice.

"What—aw—are your intentions? Allow me—aw—to expostulate. This seems vewy iwegular."

"Hyar's yer answer, then. Git down an' out!"

And as he spoke the ruffian pulled trigger.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF VIRTUE—AND MR. WOBURN.

"He's down!" shouted the leader, as his pistol spoke, and he saw his mark tumble.

"Take ther gal, blame yer, an' git away with her, ef ve'r ain't sense 'nuff ter shoot on sig't. I'll see thet he's saved fur sure."

It was easy enough to say, take the girl; but the girl was not at all willing to be taken, and as he threw her toward his pards, he gave her the chance she was looking for.

The very instant his hand left her wrists they went once more to her breast, even while she gave a great side-spring that carried her beyond his reach.

"Touch me if you dare; move hand or foot and you die. I hold the drop, and can shoot very straight."

"Aw, as aw should wemark," came in a mumbled drawl from the little heap of garments a few yards distant, and with it a pistol-shot.

"Curses on it, I'm doctored!" howled the advancing ruffian, halting suddenly, and slipping his left hand to his elbow as the revolver dropped from his right. "Why in brimstone don't you shoot?"

"If you dare!" again shouted Fan, in ringing tones. She held the two under her muzzles, and a turn of the finger would have doomed them both, but, woman that she was, she shrunk from taking life, even after the first shot had been fired. Instead, she started back, struck with a clubbed pistol a desperate blow under the ear of the wounded outlaw, that caused him

to stagger to one side with a heavy groan, and then leaping backward she caught the drop again on the two, without seeing what it was that held their hands while she had left them uncovered.

"Dwop it, men, dwop it. Aw, it is disagweeable, but there is a lady in the case and, aw, it will have to be done."

He was not dead after all. On the contrary he was very much alive; and just as cool as a cucumber. If his first effort was not a chance shot he could put the balls about where he wanted them; his disarming the ruffian-in-chief had more effect with the two satellites than a death-shot would have had, and they were in a kind of a box anyhow. Miss Fanny herself might be worth coin; but Miss Fanny's corpse wasn't worth an old-fashioned copper with a big hole in it.

As the mistress of the Quartz backed past her unexpected assistant she took a side glance, and observed his occupation.

"Here, you; don't burn powder again unless you have to. This circus ought to be about over. Just keep the drop on them and back out to the turn. After that they won't be so ravenous. The first whiff of smoke would bring all the loafers to the burg to see what was the matter, and these fellows know they could bring a good stock of rope at cost price. This has all been a mistake anyhow, and the best thing out is to bunch the cards and say no more about it. Get back. My dizzy friend is only half coming to his senses, and I may have to go to a finish after all."

While she was speaking they were acting. When she finished they were half-way to the curve, and still going, with the two toughs undecided what to do.

"Ther boss hez it bad, Red Top: what yer goin' ter do 'bout it? She's got ther drop an' he mou't be a holy terror. Kin we make ther rifle?"

"Rifle, blazes! I'm passin' tell I see what the Cracker wants. Et wa'n't part ov ther job ter sling lead. He was ter ketch, an' we was ter kerry. Wa'n't that it, Abe?"

"But he's a-coin' fur her now, I kin feel it in me bones. Ef he'd only git atwixt us so we could do suthin', but he ain't got sense ernuf fur that, an' bymby he'll be wantin' ter take it outen us."

"Keep yer eye peeled fur him, then. Ther's chance with him; but this hyar way, ef them two don't take us outer ther wet ther kunnel'd be more ner likely ter ef he seed a corpus. Hold ther aige, an' see how ther game goes. Big bettin' counts me out."

Red Top and his pard were not blessed with over and above much courage, but just now they could see their way clearer to inaction than usual, and they held out nobly.

"The Cracker," as they had called their leader, was not in a condition to do much leading. Staggered by the shot, and stunned by the blow, he was all abroad until, just as his senses cleared the quarry vanished.

"Down 'em, down 'em!" yelled Red Top, as though very much excited, plunging forward with his revolvers cocked, and followed by his pard.

"Hyar's fur 'em!" shouted his pard, as he aimed at the spot where Fairy Fan had stood an instant before.

"Hold on thar, hold on!" put in the Cracker, with his left hand knocking up the pistol barrel of Abe, as that worthy was plunging past.

"Ef you sons-ov-guns had been wuth salt we'd 'a' had her, but it's too late now. Thar's some one on ther trail, an' ef they find us in this hyar kinder work, you bet they'll chip. Knock Red Top down, an' then help me outen this. That gerloot's pill jest knocked me silly, an' I ain't straight yit. Ther back track, I tell yer, quick ez we kin take it."

That was enough. The three darted away in instant retreat, and not a moment too soon to avoid being seen by the horsemen, two of whom swept by without any idea of what had just been transpiring in the roadside dingle, and dashed on toward the Bar. They were only a couple of miners, who passed two stragglers by the way without a second glance; but unwittingly their trip to town had served a purpose. It was now too late to renew the attack.

Until they were out of hearing, Fairy Fan strode on with her hand on her pistol.

Then she halted, half-turning to face her companion.

"Young man, you have done me a service, and I'm not forgetting it. Who are you? Your face and voice are both familiar, but I can't precisely place you."

"Wellington Woburn, of—aw—Boston, and vewy much at your service. Aw was taking a stroll, and—aw—was just in time."

"Thank you for taking your stroll in my direction, and I'm not going to forget it, either, but all the same I believe you are a fraud."

"A fraud! Good gwacious, why?"

"No man could string his checks down as you did, and call the turn like you did, and yet be tied to a drawl like yours. Own up, now! You're playing the dude for a purpose. I'm your solid friend, so you needn't be afraid to open up to me."

"You suppwise me, aw, and you are mistaken all over; ou weally are. Aw have nawthing to open up, aw. Aw'm heah foah reckweation and amusement. The ways seem savage and wuff, but so fah aw have managed to be on, aw, the summit of the pile. Who have aw had the pleashah to pwotect?"

"Protect! That's good. Fairy Fan can generally look out for herself. Still, they had sanded my deck and rung in a cold snap on me, so I guess I'll have to stand it, for this time only. But don't be airish. You've just heard me mention the name I generally go by, and for the rest: if you call at the Quartz to-night you'll find me behind a little green-topped table with a little silver box in my hands, showing little bits of pictures to the connoisseurs, for all they are worth. If you do come I shall be happy to hear you say Jack, deuce, six, or whatever may be your speculation on the turn, to the limit of five hundred. That for business. As a friend I would ask you to keep this little adventure to yourself and some day I'll tell you what I really think of you."

"Aw, yes, exactly. But Jack, deuce, six, mayn't be in the box at all, don't you know. If yaw think it a safe place aw shawl certainly call. Last night, though, aw called at such a place, and weally, they were the stwangest people! One of them—he weally almost fwightezed me."

"Pluggy Becker, yes. I heard of that. If you assure me that you don't want to have it out with him, I'll have my bouncer on the lookout and fire him if he comes in for trouble. Oh, the Quartz is a 'way-up' institution, and looks out for the safety of its patrons if I have to take a hand in myself. Here we are at the Bar, though. Will you give me your arm, or shall we walk home by different paths? Make up your mind quick. If you're ashamed of me, or afraid of Pluggy Becker, I want to know."

"As we both board under the, ah, woof of the Happy Home, our paths lie together. My awm I prefer having where, aw, it will do the most good. If Mistaw Beckaw should appear, aw want to be weady for him."

"All right then!" laughed the little woman, though she still eyed him curiously.

As they did not have far to go, there was but little more said; there were no interruptions or disagreeable encounters; and when they reached the Happy Home Miss Fanny was as much surprised as amused in noting how quickly he vanished.

Yet immediately afterward a puzzled look came back to her face, and slowly and thoughtfully she entered the house.

She was not thinking about her own danger and escape either.

CHAPTER XIX.

TACKLING THE TIGER.

WHILE Miss Fanny was in such danger, the young lady for whom she believed that she had been mistaken, was having a very comfortable time, considering. Mr. Darelle certainly had not seemed, for a long time, in such health and spirits, and he talked of Bad Man's Bar with an enthusiasm that Leona soon tried to assume, even if she did not altogether feel.

"I have been making some inquiries," he said, "and I do believe I am on the right trail. There is no other clew that I know of, anyhow, and I shall wait. Perhaps he will come in disguise, but even if he does, I will search him out—I will search him out!"

"And he will know you, of course, so that if you do not recognize him be will you."

"I am not so sure of that," the old gentleman answered, somewhat mournfully, his spirits dropping at the thought.

"If anything, I will have changed the most. Think of all the years! When he left me I was still a young man. Now, sorrow and misfortune and old age have broken me up wonderfully. But I don't know if he will wait a week or two. Don't you notice? My cough is better already, and I begin to feel as though there was something to live and fight for. I am recovering my youth. Ah! they think they can get the better of Sidney Darelle! I will show them I can hold my own in spite of all the thieves and outlaws this side of the Rockies. Egbert Shaw will stand by me, and with him to assist I am not afraid of an army. Give me plenty of air, plenty of sleep, and a little exercise, and you will not know me, my dear—you will not know me."

"I hope you are right," responded Leona, doubtfully. "But I am frightened at seeing you lose your caution so completely. Do not trust this Governor Shaw too entirely. Remember, the best man here might well be the very worst man somewhere else. I have talked with him myself, and it seems wonderful that he should so suddenly become our friend. I tremble lest he, too, may prove a fraud. Perhaps it would be as well if you were to retain some of your former doubts."

"And yet it was you who drew my attention to him—advised that I should give him my confidence. Rest easy, child. I can see a reason if you cannot. Some day you may understand, too. If I only don't get to depending on him too entirely. I doubt if he will show up to-night;

and I declare to you, I almost feel as though I had lost a friend."

They talked in this strain for an hour longer, although it was late even then. Finally the old gentleman, whose eyes had now and then closed momentarily, began to yawn.

"You can go to your slumbers in comfort. Although it is doubtful if our assailants of last night would be willing to renew the attack so soon, if at all; if they do there are good men watching for them. If you hear any disturbance to-night take no land in it. You may only make trouble for the wrong man. We will be protected; never doubt it."

From time to time Darelle had coughed slightly, but now he was suddenly taken with a spasmodic fit that seemed to be a warning that nature required her sweet restorer. When the attack had subsided the two sought their rooms, from which, in ten minutes no sound proceeded save that of regular breathing. Sidney Darelle fell asleep with suspicious readiness.

He awoke still more suspiciously, for if there is anything that will bring slumber to the eyelids it is counterfeit sleep. He arose quietly and left the room softly.

As he had expected, Egbert Shaw was waiting for him.

"Ready, are you? Sorry if I kept you waiting, but, after all, the time of a man of business is not altogether his own. They come for me in season and out of season. I have just been wrestling for two hours with Colonel Stuart Boutelle, is an old time acquaintance of mine, who wants me to put fifty thousand into a hole he has in the ground and calls the Isabella. He must mean it, for he would hardly try to play roosts on me; but it's only another instance of how much a man can see if he wants to. Well. Are you ready for an excursion to the Quartz? We didn't get around there last night; but it's a place worth looking into; and it is possible that we may meet some one there who can give you some information."

"Whenever you choose, sir. I am at your service. I suppose—ough—we can find peace and quietness there, if we want them? And this Colonel Boutelle. Will we meet him?"

"I assure you there will be plenty of peace—or the warlike chiefs will hear from the fair proprietor. And Boutelle will be apt to look in. He is the kind to drop a hundred thousand while looking for half that much. That is one reason why I do not care to go in with him, in the Isabella."

"Ah, yes. A good man to know; but not a reliable partner in a strictly business enterprise. From what you say I shall be pleased to meet him. Perhaps we had better go now. The hour is growing late."

In an absent-minded way he tapped his breast, where the outlines of his pocket-book could almost be seen, and followed the governor, who was quietly laughing to himself. Sun time and local time were two widely different things at the Bar. For the night birds it was still very early in the evening.

No one seemed to notice them leaving the Happy Home, and they made their way to the Quartz unmolested.

As Darelle entered he looked around with an air of surprise.

It was certainly the neatest looking room he had seen since he began his wanderings, with Frisco as a starting-point. Everything was clean and fresh as a new pin, and arranged for taste and comfort.

In the first place here was the bar-room.

From its very arrangement it was evidently intended to be a secondary matter, attractive as it looked. Everything was as clean as paint and soap could make it; but on a diminutive scale for profit. And at the Quartz it was notorious—without the list of prices posted on the wall—that drinks cost from three to four times as much as anywhere else in the Bar.

There used to be some kicking at it; but Cy Robbins was suave. Fairy Fan was smiling but firm, the better class of citizens stood behind her, and in the end no one thought of making more than a flying call at the Quartz, when out on a jamboree. When all the rest of the camp had received its second coat of blood-red vermilion, Miss Fanny's place most frequently retained its natural color.

Shaw nodded to the three or four men who were chatting at the bar in a low tone, and requested Cy Robbins to set them up. Then, the customary offering at the shrine of Bacchus having been made, with another nod, he led the way once more.

The room into which they passed was very much larger, and furnished with something akin to elegance.

The windows were festooned with heavy curtains; half a dozen oil-paintings ornamented the walls; arm-chairs, for comfort as well as use, stood around; at one side there were several little alcoves, well lighted, containing stands and chairs for the convenience of those who wished to play at short cards, and at the end, gracefully seated behind the long table, was the fair Fanny herself.

She had eyes for everything, and saw the two the moment they entered. Her gaze rested

steadily on the governor, as though she would read his thoughts.

He stood the scrutiny without an apparent suspicion. If he had any interest in the attack made by the three ruffians, he showed neither surprise nor vexation at its failure. The cards had just been gathered up for a new deal, and as she looked up, her wrists lingering on the table, the governor stepped forward.

"Good-evening, Miss Fanny. Although an inmate with you at the Happy Home, I believe Mr. Darelle is a stranger. I have him out to see the lions, and assured him of a welcome here, and promised that he should not be a very heavy victim."

"Mr. Darelle is welcome," retorted the young lady, with a rather distant bow. "He can't lose if he don't bet—and he can't win, either. He can look on with honor—if he does more, he must take his chances for profit. You understand, Mr. Darelle, that just now I am pure business. At some other time, I shall be happy to pursue the acquaintance. Now, gentlemen, make your bets. The fun begins."

The players, of whom there were half a dozen or more, closed up again, having stood aside a little during the brief conversation, and the game went on, with Hart Hawkins prominent in the ranks of the punters.

The little gambler had been at work for some time, betting carelessly yet watching closely. He knew the tricks of his trade if he did not always use them, and this was a voyage of discovery.

For once Silent Sam was not standing at his shoulder. That worthy had preferred to remain behind, and was supposed to be at the Happy Home, on the lookout for anything like a repetition of the attack of the previous evening. Hart had posted him somewhat, though he did not let him into the entire history of the previous night's game. He had only said that Darelle had an appointment, and was crazy enough, after the warning he had received, to be willing to trust himself on the town, and his daughter alone.

"Ef ye're crazy fur ther petticut, why don't yer stay hyar an' take keer ov her?" asked Loftus, with a dogged glance.

"That would be the natural line for a young man with as high an appreciation of the sex as myself. But, Samuel, my dear, when you have a chance for two birds at one shot, let the third one go. I can watch the old gentleman, and take in the points of the priestess at the Quartz. I had a glimpse of her to-day, and I swear I believe she's more of an angel than the other. You can stay here like a good boy, while I follow the dip of the vein. That way we'll take in all, both, everything."

But at the Quartz, Hart Hawkins so far found nothing but an honest deal. If the capital is large enough to stand an occasional drain, the bank is bound to win anyhow in the long run; and, so far, the young lady had been able to meet all sporadic losses.

The coming of the two did not interfere materially with his game, though he kept an eye on them.

To the surprise of Shaw his friend manifested more interest in the game than he had expected.

"Wait a little," he said. "I want to see how my luck runs and I can perhaps do it better this way than any other. I will lose a handful of chips, or have something to show for my visit."

He purchased a little stack of checks, secured a place at the table, and went in with the rest, seeming to understand how to string his chips as well as the best of them.

"I—ough—thought so!" was his exclamation, a little later, as his first bet won. "I'm in the vein to-night. I'll cut the claws—ough—of the tiger; and then, look out! I shall be after you."

The governor smiled inwardly, for he had already noticed that the bank had been winning and Miss Fanny was not one whose luck was apt to take a sudden turn.

Hart Hawkins did not smile, though he heard the speech. There had not been any money on it; but Darelle's card had been a winner all through the last deal, and twice in this. He had just copped it to the limit, and thought he had almost a sure thing.

Nor did the governor smile again, as the game went on. He had a pile of checks before him too; but it steadily diminished in size, while Darelle as regularly won.

"Come. If you want to test whose luck is the better here is your chance. Take any card you choose and play it to win. I'll copper it. Or you can reverse that and bet clear yourself. I don't care how soon I get frozen out here; but of course I can't quit well when I am much of a winner."

"All right, answered Shaw, recklessly. "The bank can't grumble. If we make even bets it will be all the same until a split comes along, and then, it's bound to be ahead."

So the two in a friendly way tested each other to an extent that began to interest the bystanders. It was not often that Shaw had such persistent bad luck. Before he realized the size of his losses he was out a thousand dollars, while Darelle was in almost that precise amount. Shaw appeared to be weakening.

"I believe on my soul that you are standing in with the dealer. I am satisfied to quit now and go home. If you are not in for a general jamboree you had better go too. One thing is certain. If I stay in it would be all the worse for both of us."

"Hold on, then. In a minute I'll have a chance to call the turn and you'll see me whoop it up on this. All or none till I get ready to bolt. It's working. You can see yourself that it is working, now. If you really can."

And Darelle waved his hat and chuckled shrilly.

"You can see that Miss Fanny is willing to spring the cards if it is necessary," muttered Hawkins. "One won't pay the other on the turn, and she's not going to lose a thousand square if the governor stays out."

But Miss Fanny did not spring the cards, though her face wore a slightly troubled look as Darelle's call, certain as fate, came along the winner.

There was an extra glint of fire in the old gentleman's eyes as he drew in his checks.

"This may be fun—ough!"

His cough reappeared for a moment, and the fair dealer held the cards waiting for the sequence.

"This may be fun—more than pitching coppers on a rainy day—but—ough!—it might be funnier. Can't you extend your limit? I'll put the size of your bank on one card, and then, win or lose, stop."

"The bank will accept for ten thousand. If you win it closes for the night."

The answer came without hesitation; and as promptly Darelle pushed in his stock of chips, and then began heaping up notes for the balance, all on the ten.

The other bettors had quit, and a breathless silence was maintained around the table. Even the governor felt a shade more excited than was usual with him. In a square game, it does sometimes happen that fabulous winnings are made by outsiders who have more nerve than judgment, and though even yet he did not think the old gentleman's luck would be better than the bank's in the long run, yet there was a chance.

"You all done betting?" asked Miss Fanny coldly.

Of course they were. Even Hawkins had not nerve enough to copper Sidney Darelle's card.

"Then, here goes!"

Card by card the painted pasteboards slipped from the box until nearly a dozen pair had been counted out.

Then the ten won. —

CHAPTER XX.

HAIR TRIGGER TOM ARRIVES.

"It is scarcely worth while to test your system to-night," laughed the governor, recovering his coolness as the ten came out. "With such luck as yours, I don't see but what one scheme would be good as another. Anything would win."

"Just where you are mistaken—ough! After such a run of luck did you ever know a man to change his game without changing everything else? I have been pushing the game for some time to break the back-bone of the streak, so I could have a chance to show you what it would do."

"At regular retail prices? Ha, ha!"

"Oh, it must be interesting; but excuse me a moment. I must cash in."

"Right enough. Never let money go begging. I see my friend Boutelle there. Let me speak to him. He may as well join us."

Sidney Darelle made no objection, and so the three sat down to a table in one of the alcoves, each with a well-filled wallet at his elbow.

It would have been possible to have screened themselves by dropping a curtain, but none of them seemed to care for the outside world; and it was not possible for a crowd to gather in such a position that the hand of either of the players could be seen.

As Darelle sorted over his first hand with a feverish eagerness that was in marked contrast to the coolness with which he had attacked the tiger, Colonel Boutelle eyed him curiously. The colonel, in spite of what Shaw had said, was not a desperate gambler, though now and then he managed to drop quite a pile into the hands of more fortunate or more skillful players.

He could not, at first, see why the governor had invited him into the game when it looked as though he had a very good thing of it for himself alone; but it might be that the pigeon needed a little nursing, and that Shaw, intending to pluck him thoroughly, had an objection to the colonel being seen assisting in the operation.

"No limit to-night," yawned Darelle, looking up at last.

"As you choose. My limit is generally what I have with me, but of course I am only playing with you to-night for amusement."

"And you carry enough to make the winning worth while?" asked the old gentleman, cautiously.

"Generally; and to-night I am pretty well heeled. I sha'n't pass a good hand for want of

the stamps to back it. What are you going to do now?"

"I can venture to bet a hundred. The cards justify it, if nothing else."

"Hundred better," returned the colonel, tersely, putting up as he spoke.

"Sorry for you both. I believe you are both bluffing. I'll give you a chance to draw out if you are. If not, I'll find out. A thousand better, colonel; and at this rate it will soon take a heap to come in. Say your say, Darelle."

"I should stay out, but here's too much to throw away. I raise you the same figure."

"Mr. Darelle claims to know nothing at all about faro, and is doubtful of his knowledge of draw. If he is a greenhorn, what sort of sharpers do they have back East? Still, as this is the beginning of the game, it won't do to let him scare us. As you stay then, Boutelle, I think I'll go another thousand better."

The colonel had quietly put up his money, and at the raise, Darelle's eyes twinkled.

"What was good for one raise ought to able to carry another. A thousand more to my credit."

Boutelle considered, looked at the two men, and then threw his cards to the deck-head without another word.

"Where's your fund?" asked the governor, with a smile. You have just heard a great chunk of philosophy, that ought to keep you along with us. It has affected me so wonderfully that I think I will remain. Whew!"

The exclamation was involuntary, and so low that it is doubtful if the other ears caught it; but he had just glanced over his shoulder, and what he saw, wrung it out, in spite of himself. A moment later he had recovered his nerves, and was gazing blandly into the face of Leona, who stood just at the entrance to the alcove, looking in with as much curiosity as reproach.

"Leona!"

Sidney Darelle half-raised from his chair.

"What madness is this?"

"Not mad at all, my dear father, but intensely curious, though for a time I was terribly frightened."

"What! has any one offered insult?"

"Oh, no. But I awoke, and something told me to go to your room. I even thought I heard you calling. When I found you were not there, of course I feared some evil might have happened and made inquiries. By chance some one knew that you were here, and so here I came. Excuse me, gentlemen, but father's health is such that I keep an eye on him night and day. Do not let me interrupt you. I will take pleasure in looking on. Somehow, I am not a bit sleepy."

She coolly seated herself in the vacant chair at her father's elbow, smiling as sweetly as though their avocation was nothing to her.

"Perhaps the game had better stop," suggested Shaw. "Your daughter hardly cares to remain here."

"Not at all; not at all. One place is as safe as another. With us near no one will be apt to offer her any insult. Colonel Boutelle, this is my daughter. As you were saying, governor?"

"That the bets have gone too high already. I call."

"Three sixes," answered Darelle, showing out his hand with an eager air.

"Not good, by just a trifle. Three Jacks are a little better. And here they are."

Boutelle said nothing. He had thrown up two pair and was glad to get off as well as he did. He felt a little uneasy in the presence of the young lady, and wondered whether it was best to have it go on.

Leona, who was watching calmly, and without a trace of disapprobation in her face, appeared to read his thoughts.

"Do not let me interfere, gentlemen. I really know nothing else that I can do, and I think I can spend an hour at least watching you. It is a rather new experience, I assure you. I have heard so much of such scenes that I rather prefer having one glimpse. They seem quiet and orderly out there."

"Yes Miss Fanny has her patrons under very fair control; but you can never tell. I have seen very wild work here, especially after she had gone home, and left the place in charge of her assistants. Pray remain under cover if you will stay. We sha'n't make a very extended sitting, and we will all leave together. That will be all the better for you."

So much the colonel said, while Shaw shuffled the cards; then he tried to fix his attention on the game once more.

But Darelle's vein of luck had evidently run out. If the governor had rushed him, as he had seemed inclined to do before the coming of Miss Leona, the cards he held might have won him a fortune. But with that smiling young lady watching every move, the governor could hardly go deliberately back on his pledge of the morning, unless he was willing to altogether forfeit her good opinion. As it was he was more of a winner than he felt it prudent to be, drawing in dollar by dollar, or rather hundred by hundred, all that Darelle had won at faro. His luck had come around again, and he had been recouped for his own losses and had something over for a fresh start.

The first words that Leona spoke after drop-

ping into her place broke the rather uncomfortable spell.

"The hour is up, gentlemen, and I really must go. If you cannot spare my father I shall leave him in your hands. Perhaps I can find my guide here in the other room. If not—know the way thoroughly."

The governor was up in a moment.

"Hang the cards! I did not know that time had flown so rapidly. We will not spare him exactly; but we will go with you both. What sort of barbarians do you think we are? You read about such infatuated brutes; but they are not so plenty, and I never saw the game yet I would not leave for the pleasure of assisting as escort to—ah—to a young lady who wished to see the sights."

"A moment. Then there seems to be some excitement in the other room. Perhaps we had better wait until it has quieted down. It will not, probably, be long."

The governor seated himself with an air that said, command me; while Boutelle, who had not moved at all, turned to Darelle and leaning over, remarked:

"Do you expect to make any long sojourn here; or are you just drifting through, looking at the country? It was just chance that I met you to-night, for I am up to my eye in work that goes harder than pulling teeth; and I ought to be husbanding my resources, instead of dropping them into the pocket of Shaw, who has enough without them. You may think it a little rough, now, but the coming of your daughter was a godsend to us both. With the streak that Eg. is in you would have been short of change, by morning, and I would have been out of the Isabella."

"The Isabella—oh, yes, I remember. He was telling me something about it, and that you wanted a partner who could put up quite a bit of capital. How would I do? I had no idea of remaining here any time when I came in, last evening; but in spite of its roughness, I like the country, and if I saw a chance for a good investment I think I might almost be tempted to make it. You have not found any one yet?"

"The chance is still open; but I can scarcely believe that you are in earnest; you know nothing about the mine, do you?"

"Not a thing except that you are recommending it. If you mean it—if you are going to stay there, I don't know any one I could sooner trust with my money. But, I want to see where it goes to. I don't mean to stake you if you are going to leave it all at the Quartz, or with Mr. Shaw. You will find me an old hand at business, if I don't know much about mining."

"Not a bad bit that; only, I might say the same thing. You have lost five to my one this evening, and if that thing kept going on, it might burst you and the mine too. There is money in the Isabella, but it would take the Comstock lode to keep this sort of thing going on week in and out."

"But you forget that I don't always lose. The fact is, I am out of pocket very little, if any, on the evening."

"Exactly; but if you don't have such winnings to fall back on—and it's not very often any one quits the winner to any such great extent. Fan has the luck of the Old Boy on the average."

"Well, if you have the funds, I can't gamble them away. If you don't, and the Isabella is worth what Shaw tells me you say it is, it's the best thing we can do. Prove that it is an opening with the chances in its favor, and I will put fifty thousand into it to-morrow. That is business. Now let us go."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Boutelle, anxiously. "If you do, put it there. I'll give it to you straight as a line in the morning. I don't want to rope you into anything that your calmer judgment would despise; but, at the same time, I think I've got a good thing coming, and I would as soon have you share it as anybody I know."

"Thank you, thank you! I am inclined to take your word; but, come to see me in the morning. I always make investments by daylight; and I don't go far wrong when I look them over."

The two men shook hands, and the party rose. Without having made any effort, Boutelle had taken the cream of the evening; and the governor had not the time, even if he had thought it prudent, to interfere.

Together they stepped out from the alcove, paying no attention to two or three other little parties deep in draw, or the few loungers that had not been attracted by the buzz of excitement in the bar-room.

The loud talk had ceased, under the firm remonstrances of Cy Robbins; but the chief orator was there, and as the four entered, he stepped forward, planting himself directly in their way, his eyes fixed on Leona.

"You're a daisy from Daisyville, my darling, and when you look my way, I'm not hard to find. What's the racket, little one? Or have you just been taking my name in vain? You want me, and now you've got me. I'm Hair Trigger Tom, of Red Bend. I'm all wool and a yard wide!"

CHAPTER XXI.

HART HAWKINS LOOKS AT THE CUES.

THE brusque announcement was a staggerer to the four, as much from its substance as from the way it was made. Any other name would have been far differently received; and curious glances were turned toward Egbert Shaw by those to whom the man had been talking, to see how he would act. The Darelles were under his wing, and it was generally supposed that he took care of his friends.

He in turn simply stepped aside, and fixed an inquiring look on the old gentleman, who, unshaken by the rude speech, stared fixedly at the face whose clear-cut profile was fairly illuminated by the chandelier which hung almost above his shoulder.

The face was well favored, and he was, taken all over, a handsome fellow, in spite of the flush that told he had been drinking deeply. He was tall, well built, his shoulders broad, waist slender, hands and feet small, and his movements, even in the few steps that he had made, were graceful, yet strong. His eyes and hair were black as they are ever seen, and his face was smooth, all to the drooping mustache, that hung down level to his chin. His clothing was clean and well kept, being the rig of the dandy miner out on a holiday, while around his waist a broad belt supported a brace of heavy, ivory-handled revolvers and a knife.

The silence that fell on the room did not trouble him a bit. He only laughed and went on:

"Don't be dumfounded when you find me here. The men who told you I was coming hit the turn, sure. I was on the road and bound to get here. When they said that a shaky old man and a blooming damsel had gone on ahead asking questions, I pushed on after as hard as I could spelter, and now I'm here. Don't be bashful; Tom Carey is all around, and if you want a man, why, he'll fill the bill, and enough over for samples. Anything for me to do in this line? If so, speak up. For lovely woman I'd do a heap, and, as a solid friend, can't be beat. Put her there, pard—put her there!"

First he touched the butt of his revolver, and then held out a shapely hand, and stared into Leona's face with an insolent gaze, while waiting for the answer that he took for granted would come.

"Excuse me, sir. You have made a mistake. I have made no inquiries in regard to you. These gentlemen may choose to have some talk with you; certainly I will not. Let me pass!"

"Oh, don't put on frills! The gang here knows I'm in the habit of having women ask for me, and the more they say the better I like it. No time like the present, so just wait till we get this thing put into shape. Here, you, sir! What did you want with me?"

"Nothing at all, nothing at all. It was all a mistake. You are not the right man."

All the excitement, all the tremor, all the hesitancy of speech had suddenly come back to Sidney Darelle, who looked a dozen years older in the few moments that he had been trying to read the hard, reckless, yet handsome face. If he could be built up in the Bar, he could be as readily torn down. He did not even notice the coarse address that was an insult to Leona, but covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the gaze of the braggart, while he added in a feeble moan:

"After all my hopes, to be deceived thus! He Parker Darelle? Never! The last hope gone! Oh, my boy, my boy!"

"I don't fill the bill, eh? From the grunting and groaning, I judge it hits you hard. But don't be discouraged, old man, don't be discouraged! I can't be any such galoot as Parker Darelle, unless there's a special act of the Legislature that I don't know anything about; but if this young lady is your daughter, and unmarried, I don't see any just reason why I shouldn't be your son, all the same. Brace up, old man, brace up! It's easy to make that all right. If you've got rocks enough to make it worth my while, all you've got to say is, 'Take her, and be happy.' Come, my dear, ain't that the way to fix it all up, and ease your father's dotting old heart? Here's to our better acquaintance, and your ruby lips shall seal the bargain."

"Villain!" Leona exclaimed, as she drew

back from his outstretched hands. "A step nearer and you die! One who would insult an aged man and a woman who seemed utterly helpless, is scarcely fit to live."

This time she was as quick with her weapon as even Fairy Fan had been; yet her quickest was a little slow with such an expert as Hair Trigger Tom.

"Ha, ha! Do you think I would let the coming Mrs. Carey get the drop on me? See! I have the old gentleman lined, and you too. Go easy with your tools. If I just gently touch the triggers, the guns go off, and I won't miss you both. That's where I get my name, little spittire. A touch, a breath, a whisper—and, hurrah for kingdom, come!"

He pulled like lightning, and brought the muzzles to bear, with the hammers back, even before Leona's weapon had fairly seen the lamplight, or the half-dozen hands that instinctively felt for their owner's tools had tightened to draw. If Miss Darelle had been a man, he might have shot first and spoken afterward; but, in spite of her sex, he played for the lead, and held it.

His fingers could be seen just lingering by his triggers. Standing only a few feet away, with a muzzle almost touching each breast, there was not the ghost of a chance for father or daughter to escape, even if the superb ruffian dropped to instant death. Utterly reckless in regard to his own life, he held these two at bay, and chanced the interference of outsiders to send them all up the flume together. How the deadlock was to be broken did not so plainly appear.

It came in a shape nobody was expecting.

"Hello Tommy! In trouble as usual? Understood you were hunting me about that foolishness down at Glory Gulch, last spring. No, don't move. Things are very pretty as they are. You observe where my hands are, and after the loose remarks I heard you were making I don't know that there is any reason why I shouldn't shoot on sight. If, however, you want a sight for your money I'm willing to open the pot again, to let you come in. Speak sharp, now, for I'm talking professionally, and there not much room for monkeying."

Hart Hawkins was just as free and easy in his address as though he was talking about a picnic. Natty, smiling, with both hands hidden in his pockets by his sides, he stepped in front of Egbert Shaw, awaiting the answer without the least concern in his laughing eyes.

It looked as though the man addressed intended to take water. He attempted no interruption, made no immediate response, and though it was impossible to detect any wavering of his gaze, an anxious look stole over his face.

Then, without any warning, he jerked around the hand that had been covering Sidney Darelle, his finger touching the trigger as it came.

Just at that moment there were three reports, all blending together, yet a shade apart.

The first shot struck the hand that was holding straight for Leona, the ball just glancing between the fingers, and flinging the barrel around so that, when the hammer fell, Carey's bullet went wide of its mark. His snap-shot, too, went for nothing. Expert as he was the stroke on his other hand caused this to give a sudden though slight jerk, Hart Hawkins standing unharmed.

So far the danger of Miss Darelle had appeared to paralyze both the colonel and Egbert Shaw; but now that she was momentarily safe they both sprung forward, each seizing a wrist and forcing it upward, the governor exclaiming:

"Here, man, we don't want any murder, and you can thank your lucky stars that so far there has none been done. There are trees outside and ropes are plenty. Take good advice and leave the camp while you have the chance. You must be crazy mad with bad whisky; but, drunk or sober, another such cowardly bit of work and we'll hang you sure."

"Pears to have bit off a heap bigger piece than he can chew," remarked Hawkins, softly. "Thought I'd have to chip myself, but somebody saved me the trouble. Who, oh, who fired that shot?"

"Didn't you do the trick yourself? You needn't be afraid to own it, for it was a neat

piece of work, and the boys all will back you."

"Thank you, Mr. Robbins, but I don't want any credit for other people's glory. I intended to; but while I was thinking somebody else was doing. Here's my tools, you can see for yourself."

"That's all right," answered Cy, hastily, "but I must help get this bad man from 'way back out of the house, without having any blood on the floor. And, Mr. Darelle, you had better take your daughter and go. This is no place for her, anyhow, and there may be trouble such as you won't care to have a finger in or let her see."

"You are right, you are right—ough! She ought never to have come here. Come, Leona. There is nothing to be gained by staying."

"But, can we leave our friends—who have thrown themselves into trouble on our account? Why did I not shoot? Then the danger would have been over."

"You are right. That's the obituary over half the graves in the territory. But don't worry about your friends, miss. Boutelle is slow, but sure; and the governor is a holy terror when he wants to shine on the war-path. Just take Cy's advice and sherry out. There's a heap bad medicine in for you, if you stay around here. I think I'll go myself; and I'm not one of the kind that generally starts early and often. Allow me to assist you, miss."

Hawkins was rather more in earnest than usual with him, and as Darelle caught one arm he laid his hand lightly on the other. Between them they led Leona through the door.

"Now, my friends, there's the straight road to the Happy Home, and if you'll take advice, the sooner you measure it off the better. Of course I wanted to throw Cy off; but I can't leave like that. Otherwise four horses and a band wagon couldn't coax or draw me out of such charming society. Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

"One moment, if you please," interrupted Miss Darelle. "I think I heard you call that brute by name. Tell me, is he really the man he represented himself to be—Thomas Carey—Hair Trigger Tom, as he seems more generally called?"

"I can't say much about the Carey part, since names don't go for much out here, but I'll swear to the Hair Trigger Tom part. Know him like a book. Had to show him up last spring, down at the Gulch—some nonsense about a cold deck, and an arm-strap, that you wouldn't understand—and he's been leaving word for me at every camp he's struck since. Confounded lucky I happened to be on deck. He's a real bad-looking man, and always worse than he looks."

"Thanks. Then, if I mistake not, our visit here has been a failure, and there will be no need for a longer stay. Whether it was on your own account or not, you have done us a favor, for which we are not ungrateful. I hope that we can prove it yet, and that you will find no serious inconveniences resulting."

"No danger at all, unless the time has come to cash in, sure, and then it wouldn't make a bit of difference. There would be nothing but the hock card in the box, anyhow. But this advice mind, though of course I'm a fool for giving it: Lovely woman had better not try to take her own part. She don't mean it when she ought to, and shoots wild when plumb center is the proper thing. That makes the chivalry hold out while the other fellow is filling his hand; and by that time he's got four aces and a king and there's no use to chip. No, miss. Trust the chivalry of the rowdy West to look after your interests in such cases, or leave in the first stage. You'll only get some good men killed, and won't have a very interesting time yourself, either."

Without waiting to see how her advice was received, Hawkins slipped back into the Quartz, leaving Leona to infer that he considered the way she had handled the affair was beneath contempt.

"Good advice too, my daughter," coughed Sidney Darelle as he led her away.

"If you had not produced a weapon he would have had no excuse for showing any. If it had not been for Mr. Hawkins I do not know how it would have ended. Let us hasten back to the hotel."

"I am going, as fast as I can. But, tell me. Have you any idea who fired that shot?"

"How should I know—ough? Hawkins perhaps—or Egbert Shaw. It came at a good time, ough; I was too broken up to notice. Oh, dear! That Hair Trigger Tom? There *must* be some mistake. It does not answer to the description at all. We will wait and see—wait and see. How unfortunate! How very unfortunate! Yet I have heard that there was a chance for a bonanza in the Isabella. I cannot go so far wrong in that if Boutelle is not deceiving me. We will wait and see. My boy will come yet."

An angry answer was trembling on the lips of the young lady; but they were nearing the hotel, and a loitering figure suddenly strode up.

"Excuse me, gov'nor; but kin I have a word with you?"

Darelle recognized the voice of Pluggy Becker. Releasing Leona's arm, and telling her to go as he fell back to listen.

"I dunno ez it's any use ter you, but I thought I'd better let yer know. Yer young friend hez throwed up his heards an' sloped."

"I can hardly believe it. But if so, look out! He may come back, he may come back."

"Yes, in time fer a funeral," rumbled Becker.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. WOBURN APPEARS, AS USUAL.

It is almost needless to say that Fairy Fan was out when all this disturbance occurred at the Quartz. She might not have been able to manage matters any better than Cy Robbins; but if she had been there her voice would have been heard, if not her pistols.

Cyrus was wishing for her as he turned away from the Darelles; but it happened that he did not have quite as heavy a contract as he expected.

The threat of the governor brought Carey to his senses somewhat. There's nothing more brutal than mob law, and the redoubtable Hair Trigger Tom did not care to risk it.

"All right; I'm peaceable as a lamb, if you don't crowd me; but they wanted to see Hair Trigger Tom, and they got sight of him, big as a bear. Maybe they won't ask after him quite so often. And—and—where's that Hart Hawkins? Curse him! He tried to get a rope 'round my neck down at Glory Gulch last spring, and I'm getting even, hit or miss. You all saw he tried to shoot me down when I had my hands full. If he hadn't been too big a cur to hold straight he'd have bored me through the back. He had all the chance, and the right good will—curse him for the hound that he is—and when he missed, because he was holding at a *man*, he ran away. Bring the dog out and string him up if you must have a necktie festival."

There was quite a crowd around him now, and a dozen were talking at the same time; but his voice arose above the voices of the rest in an angry roar.

Cy Robbins was about the only one who knew that Hawkins had left the building, and he was willing to give the little sport a few minutes' grace if he was willing to take them. Probably the two would come together, but it would not be so near the Quartz. He pushed in and boldly laid his hand on Carey's shoulder.

"My friend, when Miss Fan's away I'm the boss here, and I prefer you to hang up on this till you get cool enough to hear sense. You know Hart Hawkins ain't that kind; and I know that he didn't take any pot shot at you. If he'd done it he'd have blowed you to kingdom never come back ag'in. He showed me both his tools, with the filling all in, and he said he'd see you later. He's gone to see that little lady home—and if you monkey around her any more, it's just as the governor says; and blame lucky you are that they don't hang you now. We're tough here, at the Bar, but there's a streak of whiteness that won't let us go back on a lady."

"A lady! Quit that; you make me tired. A lady—and Hart Hawkins's side pard?"

"You're mistaken there, Mr. Carey. They are strangers at the Bar, came here looking fer somebody. It might have been coin in your pocket if you had met them square."

What devil possessed you to get up on your hind legs and howl?"

"Looking for some one! You're right they were. They were looking for *me*. And that whelp, Hawkins, was following at their heels to pull when they found me. He knows he and I can't get in the same district together and both live. I tell you, they are all in the same swim together. Bring them out, woman and all. I'll take them one at a time or all together!"

The man's excitement was rising again.

"Now, come, Mr. Carey, stop this."

Cy spoke more sharply. It is hardly worth while to argue with such a man; but that was his order—first.

"The Quartz is pure business; and we don't run it with fighting whisky. If you want to shout over forty-red bug-juice go somewhere else. Either calm down and make your company comfortable or get out. And that's the last time of asking."

"Or you'll put me out? Why, you puny, insignificant, loving gim-crack of a jolt-head, it's because I'm listening to reason that I ain't dropping you now. I've piled up a whole cord of stiffs, and had my breakfast, while I've been slouching 'round here, trying to keep the peace. Here, you, look out, or the tools will talk!"

It was a fact that the man had made no struggle from the instant that Boutelle and the governor had seized his hands. They had only held them until Robbins had taken the floor, and then dropped back, eyeing Carey warily.

Now he sprung back, until his shoulders touched the wall, and raising the muzzles of his revolvers glared about him.

"You'll put me out? *You* will? Come and try it—*only* come and try it! Don't come alone, but bring the whole gang, bouncers and all! I'm the chief from Red Bend, and the circus is open! Catch right hold! Oh, I'm bad—a heap bad! Put me out, will you? Why don't you sail in? Why don't you take hold? Why don't you try it?"

Cyrus stood looking at him, chewing a splint of pine reflectively, and waiting for the ebullition to calm.

"I suppose I could do it, if that was our style; but a stranger, as I remarked before, we always give a chance. He may be white and sandy. If he is we let him show it, and keep free coffins stored in the loft for those that try."

"Drop that! Bottle up and get to work, unless you're all wind and are willing to own up!"

"As I was going to remark; we don't have knock-downs and drag-outs here, but when a gentleman proclaims himself a chief, we ask him outside to prove it."

"And when he don't go?" snorted the man from Red Bend.

"We blow up the whole shebang with dynamite, and build a new Quartz on the next vacant corner lot. But you will hardly push us to extremities. Come, sir. The night air is pleasant, the moonlight delicious, and we have a little plot of ground all measured off in the rear of the building. Bring your pistols, and we'll continue the conversation there, unless you want a little time to explain just how you wish to be planted, and what sort of ceremonies you want at the grave."

Cyrus was extra polite—he was a graduate of Yale, and could talk English as well as the best, when he wanted to.

"And you think you can shoot? And you mean it, square and certain? Good enough! I'm with you; and when we get through some of these other gentlemen may have their turn. The Bar ought to turn out enough fun to keep one's hand in."

"Come on and see; and you, gentlemen, can look out that the stranger has fair play. If he ever does get away, he'll be able to say that the bad men at the Bar always give an outsider an even show to make the ripple."

Cy Robbins was rather an exceptional pistol-shot—as the permanent residents of the Bar were in general, as compared with the outside world—but it is doubtful if he intended, at the outset, to get into any such corner as this.

He never went back on his word, though; and he turned as coolly as though he meant all he said, and a heap more. He did not even show any signs of relief when a crisp, careless voice interposed:

"Thank you, Cyrus, for keeping the lamb in play till I had the young lady off of my hands, but this seems to be *my* entertainment, and I couldn't think of letting you go any further! I'll just take hold of the arrangements, as you have them set up, and see how our friend from Red Bend pans out. He may, by the way, be from that festive burg, but I notice he gives it a wide berth. I notice, also, a coil of hope hanging over every bar in the camp, and every tumbler-juggler that I struck for the meaning remarked that it was for Tom Carey, the first time he came in. Now, then, Thomas, name your variety. How is it to be?"

"One at a time, and they'll last longer. I'm going first for the man that took one shot at me when I wasn't looking. At least he claimed that he did when I wanted to give you the credit of it. After that you come next—if you haven't run away!"

There had been another change in Hair Trigger Tom. The flush had left his face and he was deadly cool.

"If you're taking Cy Robbins first because he shot your drop away, you're making the mistake of the season. He's just been holding you here till I got back. Now, then, hold your hush and get down to business."

"You galoots will put up one game too many between you. If he didn't, who did? Answer that and I'll shoot you for fun or stamps."

"That's something he don't know, I can't tell, and you won't find out, if you moon around for a month of Sundays. I'm *waiting* for you."

He turned his back on the desperado as he spoke, and sailed off as though there was no danger of his being shot from behind.

Without hesitation Carey and the crowd followed, with the exception of Egbert Shaw and Colonel Boutelle.

The two had dropped out of the front rank long ago, and were watching the proceedings with silent interest.

"Of all good men gone to seed he takes the cake," said the colonel, heartily. "That kind of a man, when he does turn tough, turns it all over."

"Yes," responded Shaw, absently, "and the oddest thing I see about it is that that man is *not* Hair Trigger Tom at all. He would make two of the original, as I saw him. It looks to me as though some one had hired him to make a dead set at our friend, Darelle. You had better look out and hurry matters up a little or you will be out a partner, sure."

"Are you sure about that? Hawkins is a reckless little fellow, but he's not staking his life that way unless he knows what he is doing."

"Just as sure as I am of my life. Hair Trigger Tom was a little fellow, hardly as big as Hawkins. He drank little and talked less, while this fellow is all talk and drink. I'd give a dollar to know what it is."

"Aw, weally, governor, that is too cheap, aw. But wouldn't it be best, aw, for you to unmask him?"

The drawling tones of the Boston dude broke in with a suddenness that completely upset the governor.

"How—why—what difference does it make to the rest? If Hawkins is not a party to the deceit, then he is the man that he means. The rest have no interest; and, after all, I may be mistaken. Let them fight it out. I'm taking no stock either way."

"But, aw, don't you see, it should be stwopped. What would Mistaw Hawkins say if he found, aw, he was killed by the wrong man? If you don't stop it, I will!"

"Better hurry, then," remarked the colonel, to whom the new arrival was an utter stranger. They are in position by this time, and in five seconds more there will be one dead man, if not two."

"Gwacious! Heah, stwop! It's a mistake! That's the w'ong man!" shouted the dude, as he skipped out in the direction of the combatants and the crowd. "Mistaw Hawkins! Heah! He's a fwaud, he's a fwaud! Stwop it, stwop it! Don't you heah?"

"Fire!" echoed the voice that had been chanting the signals, and the two men were wheeling, for they had been standing back to back at fifteen paces, when the dude, rushing out upon the scene, came headlong upon Tom Carey.

He was in a mighty bad place if Hawkins shot a shade wild; but he was equal to the emergency.

With a convulsive effort, he threw his arms around Hair Trigger Tom, and suddenly fell backward to the ground, bringing Carey with him.

The two fell with a squelch, the desperado on top.

"Ohah! Weally!"

Hawkins, on the very touch of the trigger, saw the interference, and without understanding it, gave a quick turn to his wrist, that sent his bullet whistling upward, and then came forward, while the crowd closed up, laughing at the dismal exclamation of Mr. Woburn. It was most likely that this was all going to end in a tragedy, but meantime they were willing to take all the fun that was going.

"I thought so," was Hart's exclamation, bending over till he got a view of the two men that were rolling over on the ground. "I thought so. Here, Cy, take a leg and we'll pull them apart. Somebody spank that dude and send him home. There ought to be a committee standing over him with a shotgun till he gets out of camp. He can't move a rod without getting into trouble."

"Yes, but every time he draws he files," said Robbins. "From what I hear of him, he's a tearer. Look out he don't mount you."

"Not a bit of it; I'll run first," and the little gambler, catching hold of an ankle by a quick snatch suited the action to the word, and running around in a half-circle, brought the two men in a straight line, end to end, with their heads together, and their grip broken.

"Whah's Miss Fanny?" spluttered Wellington, rising to a sitting posture, his clothing disarranged, his hat beaten down to his ears, and a smutch of blood beginning to show on his face.

"Whah's Miss Fanny? She invited me to call at the Quartz, but did not pwomise me such a hawwid weception. Bwing her to the scene of battle, and let her see the work of, aw—her hawnds."

He stared wildly around, and then for the first time the crowd noticed that Hair Trigger Tom did not move.

He lay perfectly still, in a horribly suggestive heap.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HART HAWKINS COMMITS HIMSELF.

BAD MAN'S BAR felt no particular thrill the next morning, the workers going to their work as usual, and the idlers lounging around according to custom, perhaps talking about the late ripples of excitement at the Lay-out, the Happy Home and the Quartz in a listless, perfunctory way.

Such events as rough-and-tumbles, and shooting matches were too frequent to elicit much remark, unless they had a much more remarkable ending.

For, after all the racket the night before, as far as heard from nobody was killed or wounded. There may have been some remark as to why Eg. Shaw had not shown further forward, and some curiosity to know just how the man from Red Bend had been so thoroughly and quickly laid out. When he got up he was a subdued chief. There was a black and blue mark on his throat, a little cut on his temple, and he had lain senseless for a quarter of an hour.

"I guess it's not my night on," he muttered, quietly, after a stare all around. "They're not here now; but perhaps I'll see 'em all later."

Then he stalked away into the darkness, without even thanking the two or three men who had taken the trouble to resuscitate him. The dude had been hustled out of the way, the colonel and Shaw had taken their departure, and Hart Hawkins was in the bar-room, setting them up for the house, and puzzling over the meaning of it all.

When Sidney Darelle and his daughter came to breakfast together, the old gentleman seemed a little more timid than usual, while Leona had a troubled look. Darelle could be very obstinate—in fact, he always was; and the young lady, who had been airing her opinions about the proposed investment in the Isabella, and strongly urging that after the failure of the night before it was best to turn their faces eastward once more, found

that she might as well have saved her breath.

"No, Leona. If I am to fail in finding your brother; if—ough—this is all delusion; if that double-dyed ruffian, who last night claimed the name, is really he whom I thought my son, then it is too late to hope to find him, or even traces of him."

"Then why not go at once? We run even more risks than you know of."

"Because, if we lose one million we can and will make another. I cannot go back poorer than I came. I will not. Ough! And may be he *will* come. Who knows? Oh, I know he's not dead. He can't be dead."

His voice died away in a whine, and he turned aside.

When he did that there was nothing further to be said, and a little later the two went to their breakfast.

Boutelle had not forgotten—neither had the governor; for though the colonel came early the other was earlier.

"Mr. Darelle, good morning. I want to talk over the unfortunate escapade of last night; but I must say a word of warning first to be sure that I will have time. You *will* permit me, will you not?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly. Though, ough, I am not afraid, not at all afraid. I can see that in every crisis some one comes to our aid. For a moment I trembled before that ruffian; but it was because the sudden reaction and disappointment almost destroyed my nerves. Speak, I will gladly listen."

"It is not in regard to your personal but your pecuniary safety. You were talking to Boutelle last night about investing in the Isabella. If there was anything in it don't you think I would have known it and seized the chance before you had even heard of it? I do not say you will lose money—the colonel is an honest man, if a little reckless—but you can make comparatively, nothing; and it will be several years, in my judgment before you will even realize the interest of your money. Think if you can afford to make an investment that for so long a time will be practically dead."

"Ha, ha!" cackled the old gentleman.

"I understand, I understand. But I am not like you younger bloods. I have learned it is best to build for the future. You see I have come into a fortune that is practically uninvested. I have oceans of money, sir, that is bringing me nothing, and it does not trouble me. I can put fifty thousand into the Isabella and not feel it—ough!"

"But as the colonel requires cash will it not cramp you in your search to pay out so large a sum? For your own sake and that of your daughter I am trying to have you at least examine the situation well."

Darelle leaned over, his voice dropping to a whisper.

"I can hand him the amount here and now and have enough left to meet any amount you choose to put up on four aces. Don't be mistaken. Sidney Darelle plays his own money on his own game, and no folly of mine can ever wreck Leona's fortune. Many thanks for your advice; but I think the colonel is coming now."

"Very well. Of course you will do what seems best. Please consider what I have said as confidential. I do not want any chance for hard feeling on Boutelle's part, though I felt I must do my duty."

As he spoke, he noted that the door at the back of his *vis-a-vis* opened noiselessly, and Leona stood there with her finger on her lip. When she saw that she had caught his eye she beckoned him with an almost imperceptible motion, and then retired, softly closing the door behind her.

Just nodding to Boutelle, who came a moment afterward, he went out and was met by the young lady, who had hastily donned a walking-suit.

"Come; let us get away from here. I must have some one to confide in, and though you have deceived me twice, it may be that you are honest for all that."

"Seemingly deceived you. Pray say it that way. You have honored me with your confidence so far that I think I understand the position. Twice I found myself where I had to act for your best interests, without consulting you. If I erred, it was not intentional. You will say that I profited by it, but otherwise some one else might have profited much more. Perhaps it would be

safer if I were to carry out to the end a scheme that has suggested itself to me. It were better that the imprudent amount of wealth that he carries with him were transferred from him to you. Could I not help to that end? If so, command me."

"I believe you—I believe in you. Yet, dare I trust you?"

When Leona looked at a man as she looked at Egbert Shaw, he felt the gaze burn through and through. He forgot to be the cold, dispassionate man of the Bar, and returned it with interest, until a deep blush suffused her cheeks, and her eyes fell. They walked on in silence together, though Miss Darelle could feel that the arm she lightly touched was trembling.

At last she broke the hush.

"Perhaps I have less feeling than I should. Perhaps I seem to you cold-blooded in thus discussing the affairs of Sidney Darelle, but when I lift the veil a little from the past, you may see some reason why I should be pardoned."

"You need no pardon. For one so young the situation—the responsibility—is terrible. I remain here only till I can arrange or close out my ventures. A man can live here when he is finding a fortune in it; but for a woman, it must have the bitterness of death itself. To stay and helplessly watch a maniac make shipwreck of her life and fortune—I can imagine nothing more terrible. Count on me to aid you to the extent of life itself."

"You have said some cruel words; but they are true. Yet you do not know the whole truth. I have told you that my brother was driven from home; I did not then care to go further, though there was more to say. Such as you see him now, he is an improvement on what he once was. After his way, he is kind and thoughtful. Once, at times, he was a raging tiger. It was those fearful bursts of passion that drove Parker from home, and within a year my mother also, who took me with her."

"Had she no friends to stand between?"

"Yes; but what could they do? A separation was quietly arranged, she was given her daughter, and they lived apart until she died. Money was not wanting, for he is no miser; but he broke her heart. In spite of all his kindness to me I cannot forget that."

"You are an angel though you cannot!"

The exclamation seemed to slip out in spite of himself, and Leona's eyes drooped as she heard it.

"Not altogether," she answered, with a feeble attempt at playfulness. "If I were, I would not be looking to man for aid. But Providence seems so far off; and this Colonel Boutelle so very near. If he invests in that wild mining scheme he will never leave here until the last cent is gone. The cards were bad enough; but add that and what chance have I? Before long his brain will give way altogether."

"Perhaps it can be prevented. Do not lose hope. Your father seems to be sharp enough in matters that pertain to business, and he will hardly go so deeply into a mining speculation without at least visiting the property. Can you not induce him to take that precaution? That will put off the evil hour a little, and meantime something may be done."

"Again you give me courage. After the dreadful affair last night we were both almost prostrated. The disappointment was so great. Father will not confide; and I can not imagine how he could have gone so far wrong. No trace, even, of resemblance."

"But may not there be a mistake? This braggart might have assumed the name of a better man—though the villain was handy enough with his tools."

"Oh, no. Mr. Hawkins knows the man quite well, and he assures us that this is the real Hair Trigger Tom himself. He came out with us, to see us safely started on our way, and then went back. As I noticed him about the hotel this morning I suppose the matter had a peaceful ending."

"Much more so—if you mean without fatality—than it would have had if your friend, Mr. Woburn, had not, in his usual blundering way, taken a hand. Who is he? Do you know anything more about him than your father?"

"What! Mr. Woburn?"

She paused and looked suspiciously at the governor. The idea of the young man from

Boston interfering with Tom Carey's progress on the war-path seemed too ridiculous. Yet people are not always what they seem, as she very well knew.

"Yes. I have already cautioned your father against him. If he is in disguise it is well assumed. If he is himself he has either had a great streak of luck, or he is a very strange compound. At least, let me advise you to beware of him."

"The caution is not new; but it is the first time I have taken it seriously. But who is he?"

"That is what I would give a thousand to know. He may be your danger yet."

"I hardly think so; though who knows?"

She spoke thoughtfully and paced along with her eyes fixed, for some time, on the ground, the governor not caring to break the silence.

Yet, finally, as he was about to speak, she halted, and putting her hands lightly on his shoulders looked him once more straight in the eyes, with a searching look.

"And, my friend, if the worst comes to the worst, can I depend on you to the end?"

"To the bitter end, so help me heaven!" cried Shaw, carried willingly away by the pleading little beauty.

"I swear it!"

"The test may be sterner than you think; but so let it be."

Then they paced back toward the Happy Home, and were met on the porch by Sidney Darelle.

"Well, I have almost concluded the bargain with the colonel, but he insists on my viewing the property. We start to-morrow. Of course, my dear, I would not think of leaving you here, so you must be ready. And, governor, I proposed that you should be with us as an expert. Put on your biggest spectacles and be prepared to show me why I am a fool for my venture."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A THRILLING CORRESPONDENCE.

PLUGGY BECKER lounging disconsolately in front of the Lay-out scarcely looked up as Egbert Shaw approached. It was not part of his game to more than nod unless the governor indicated that he desired a conference.

But the governor did want him this time, as a little movement of the finger testified, so he got up and carelessly nodded to Shaw.

"What sort of a time are you having on the heels of that dude?" asked the governor. "It seems to me you were to keep your eyes open and now and then make a report."

"That's wot I've bin a-doin'," answered Pluggy, in a tone that was not just altogether as smooth as oil.

"I've hed my eye on ther gerloot; an' I've made my report fur good onless thar's a new deal. The ole coon antied up like a leetle man, too. I've cashed in fur good an' his two hundred an' fifty are in my buckskin ter say so. Ef I'd hed a leetle more ter say guess he'd 'a' made it five."

"Well, why didn't you wait till you had more, then?"

"Because, pardy, ther cards be run out, ther lamps turned down, an' ther game closed. Thar's nothin' more ter say."

"The blazes! And why not?"

"'Cause he's skipped ther ranch an' moseyed fur ther other side ov ther divide."

"You don't mean to say that you have been getting even, and laid him out?"

"Thunder, no! I mean jest what I say. He hedn't ther spunk ov a brindle mule with a bob tail, an when he seen what he'd done he jest packed his kit an' run away. I'd foller ef it wa'n't thet it'd be too durned hard explainin' away frum home what I wanted with sich cattle."

"About what time did he clear out?" persisted Shaw. "You're good on the average, but you've got a slippery man to deal with, and there may be some mistake. He has more nerve than good looks, and don't you forget it."

"Ez nigh ez I kin make out he started at ther time he skooted 'round ther corner ov ther house, an' ef he hain't hed any pull-backs he's a-runnin' yit. Frum what Slim Jimmy said, an' he met him on ther road, he's all broke up."

"Slim Jimmy be hanged!" snorted the governor. "He never met him; or, if he did, he was running this way. He was

'round at the Quartz last night, and laid out the worst man I ever saw without ever pulling a gun. You are 'way off, unless you're afraid to tackle him, and are talking to get out."

"How's that about last night? Say that again, pard, and say it slow. I snorted my head off, gave the old man his pointer, an' then went home ter bed."

"And you haven't heard about the circus at the Quartz last night?"

"Nary a hear. That ain't on my stamping-ground. Fan says a near view spiles my good looks. I'm better lookin' at a distance. I wants ter show off to ther best advantage afore ther fair sects: an' so I keeps my distance."

The governor boiled it down thick, and gave him the substance of the story about what had happened, leaving out all mention of the little game that had preceded the riot.

"Dash my eyes! And that is the kind of a hairpin he is! I'll swar ther more I bin a-lookin' at him ther more I can't b'lieve it. An' you say ther Hair Trigger Tom ez turned up thar war a snide, an' clean ther wrong feller."

"He may go by that name in these regions; but he is not the man that either Darelle or I mean, nor is he the man that Major Bang met in Tucson. I'd sooner believe that Woburn was the man, though he looks nothing like him."

"When a feller changes his coat an' combs his ha'r it makes a thunderin' sight of difference. Wot you want me to do, anyhow?"

"Kill him if you meet him—and then, if I was sure of one thing, I'd set you at bigger game. But what I want now is for you to be on hand in the morning, with a mighty good mount. We're all going on a thirty-mile trip to look at a mine. There is no telling what is going to happen; though one thing is sure, I don't intend to let Boutelle beat me out of fifty thousand that I ought to have."

"All right, my lord. I'll be thar ef yer thinks you kin wring me in with ther party."

"No trouble in that. I am along as expert; and you go with me. It is hard to tell what may happen before we get back. If that young man from Boston is of the party, I am afraid he will be left behind."

"I tell yer he's skipped!" broke in Becker, coming back with the old song.

"Thunder! Who's that?"

He pointed at a man who came swinging down the street with an air as independent as though he owned Arizona from the Calabasca Mountains to Yuma City.

"That is the man who opened the proceedings—Hair Trigger Tom, of Red Bend. What infernal racket is he on now?"

"I tell yer," whispered Becker, bending over, and catching Shaw by the wrist in his excitement.

"I tell yer, that's him, now."

"Who? Are you crazy?"

"Woburn, ther spindle-shanked dude. Ef it ain't him it's his brother. He kin put on fresh duds an' paint his hair all ther way up to ther mines, but he can't fool Pluggy. I kin see his ears a-stickin' out. He's bound fur ther Quartz ag'in, an' I'll foller ef it takes a wheel off."

"Sing low, then, till you find out you're a fool," angrily retorted Shaw. "I have no use for him, and have too much on hand to risk letting him work up a row with me. When he gets ripe I may throw him in his tracks if I find it suits my hand, but I'm not taking any stock in the nonsense you've been trying to get through me. You can go to the Quartz, but Diamond Charley's will do for me. Look out for your brains, if you have any; and if you're living be on hand in the morning."

"Either we're all going crazy, or there's the queerest developments going on now that ever went anywhere," he continued to himself as he entered the Lay-out. "I'm in for the stake of a lifetime if the cards come my way. If they don't—it's a voyage up the flume, I reckon. I wonder if I am losing my grip; or if it's only my head gone, mourning over that girl. Confound it, I don't know what to make of her. Is she shrewder than she seems, and is she playing me for a flat? But for what object? So far she has never committed herself, yet, if I

read her eyes aright, I am going to be the friend of her life—and something more. Only give me time, and I don't care whether the old fool is willing to back his theory or not."

In some such way ran his thoughts, though they were more troubled than his words may seem to imply. More troubled, in fact, than those of Pluggy Becker, who loosened both revolvers and imagined that he was on a straight trail.

Yet when he entered the Quartz nothing was to be seen or heard of the stranger sport. If he had come in there no one seemed to have taken notice of him, nor did he appear, though the tough waited for him at least an hour.

For an hour or two more Becker roamed around among the other bars; even, for a little while, standing at the governor's shoulder as he bet against the little game that the smiling Hawkins had opened at the Lay-out, then something brought him back to the Quartz in time for a wild roar of excitement that had just come in with the tide.

A young man with a straggling goatee, and a face that was generally expressive of wonder, came rushing in.

"Whar's Miss Fairy Fan? I've got a letter for her; I've got somethin' that will make her open her eyes so wide she kin see six Sundays in a month. Whar is she? Trot her out afore I burst myself spittin' out ther hull truth aforehand, which I swore I wouldn't. Gosh, yes!"

"Who are you, young man? Who are you?" asked Cyrus, who was again on deck.

"Oh, I'm Tommy Tough, from Red Bend last, an' I hev a letter."

"Give it to me then, and I'll see that she gets it the fu'st thing in the morning."

"The morning!" howled Tommy. "That won't do, she must hev it *now*. Ef she don't he'll go ter kingdom come!"

"Don't splutter," said Cy, softly. "No doubt it's important, and all that, and I'll see if the madam is around. If she ain't you can keep the letter, and he can go. I don't know that we've lost anybody that we're weeping over."

"But, good gracious gosh, look a yere. Thar's a man's life a-hangin' on it, an' ef anything happens ter him thar'll be a holy ole picnic."

"Whose life is hanging on it? What's this young gentleman trying to get through him?"

Miss Fanny made her appearance at this juncture, and relieved Cyrus of any further responsibility.

"Yer can't prezactly prove it by me; but hyar's yer letter; an' ef that don't tell, call me a liar frum 'way up ther krick. It's a mighty bad piece ov bizzness, ary way."

He drew from his breast-pocket the document that he thought of so much importance and placed it in Miss Fanny's hands.

As Tommy's announcements had been public, or a little more so, there were plenty of curious listeners.

"Where did you get this?" asked Fan, turning the letter over in her hand without opening it.

"Jest a few minnits ago, ez I war a-strollin' away inter town thar war a man met me. He war jest an ord'nary sort er appearin' man when I war a lookin' at him; but he war red blazes an' all ter talk to. He stopped me an sez:

"'Be you a-goin' inter ther Bar?"

"'Ef I ai'n't I dunno it,' sez I. 'This hyar orter be ther road, unless it's moved sence ther las' time I war thar.'

"'Don't be smart,' sez he, 'fur I've knowed sech kinder people ter git suddenly sick.'

"An' 'ith that he whips out two revolvers, an' hed me kivered."

"'Now,' sez he, 'I want yer ter take a letter ter ther leetle duck ez runs ther Quartz, and say 'ith my compliments, if ther matter ain't fixed 'thin forty-eight hours we'll hang ther young man fur sure, an' send a leg in fur a sample. How does that strike yer?"

"It struck me heavy, an' I tole him so."

"'Wal,' sez he, 'you kin jest sw'ar ter do ez I've tole yer, er set out fur kingdom come. Up with yer hands, an' say it straight.'

"So me hands went up; an' I swore tell ther road turned green, it was so blue 'ith

brimstun; an' then he gives me ther letter, an' I kin jest ez tight ez laigs could kerry. I'm all outer bre'th now. Kin yer gimme a drink, an' charge it ter that postmaster-gin'ral? I've earnt it, gosh, yes."

Fanny said nothing, but nodded affirmatively to Robbins, and tore open the envelope, a cloud rising in her face as she read the contents.

"What is it, Miss Fanny? Anything that the public can help you in, if you read it for general edification?"

"The public may as well hear it; but I'll have to help myself—I suppose, because I can't. It's only a matter of ten thousand; and I'm not sure the little vagabond is worth that. Here it is. Open your ears and eyes, and keep your mouths shut until I get through:

{ "HEADQUARTERS RED BEND AGENCY.
Date Unknown.

"DEAR MISS FANNY:—

"It grieves us to the very soul to be compelled to draw on you without notice, but the case is urgent, and we ask your immediate attention. A young stranger, slightly known at the Bar as Wellington Woburn, has fallen into our hands. As he had no coin available we intended to scalp him, but he suggested that you might be willing to advance his ransom, which has been fixed at the moderate sum of ten thousand dollars. As one of our friends was recently skinned alive at the Quartz we felt like doubling that amount when we heard your name mentioned, but wishing to keep our established reputation for fair dealing we have held to the original sum. A public announcement that you will be responsible for the amount will bring an intimation as to the ways and means of payment, which will be followed by the release of the present unhappy victim."

"I am, madam,

"Very respectfully yours,

"COLONEL JOHN LONGHAND."

"The infernal rascal! What does he mean, referring to you? Announce publicly that they may hang and be blessed, and don't give the matter a second thought. Longhand wouldn't commit such an outrage, anyhow. If he did, except for the name it would give the Bar, I don't think the lamentation would be loud."

"Some things ain't the same as others, my dear governor," retorted Miss Fanny.

"There is an appendix that explains more fully, and you will see that I have to provide the pewter. Here it is:

"MY DEAR SISTER:—

"I have fallen into the hands of the Philistines. While trying to make my exit from the Bar I was captured by a gang of road-agents, who train under the banner of a still greater ruffian, styling himself Colonel Longhand. He sends herewith a demand for ten thousand dollars' ransom. If it is in the wood, arrange to pay it and I will make it square when we meet. If you don't comply it is positively settled that my mortal existence will come to a sudden ending. They insist that I have been slaughtering some of their 'pardes.' Give my love to old Mr. Darelle and his daughter. It is unnecessary to add that my hopes in that direction have gone glimmering."

"Affectionately,

"Your brother,

"ARLINGTON AUBURN."

"That settles it," she continued. "He's not much to look at, but he's all the brother I've got, and I'll have to pay the ten, if I mortgage the Quartz."

"An' didn't I tole yer so?" whispered Becker in the colonel's ear. "He skipped on ther first boat, an' thar's whar he landed."

CHAPTER XXV.

A LITTLE MORE CONFIDENCE.

THE following morning Egbert Shaw was on hand bright and early, as was Colonel Boutelle.

It was a pleasure to be met by Miss Leona; but their ardor was a little dampened when she announced that her father would be unable to undertake the expedition, that day at least. Nothing serious was the matter as yet, but he had undergone so much lately that he was afraid to run any risks. In a day or so he would probably be at their service.

"A day or so from now may not suit so well, but I will try and provide," muttered Shaw, while Boutelle expressed with much earnestness his regrets, and his hope that a day or so would bring Mr. Shaw all right.

With fifty thousand at stake he might well be anxious.

Presently Miss Leona excused herself to look after the invalid, whereat the two gentlemen went away.

"Things do not look as brilliant as they did yesterday," Shaw was thinking. "A cloud has come over the spirit of our dreams. What can the matter be? Does she doubt

me; or has the old gentleman recovered his senses and determined to take the back track? I must find out. And that little vixen at the Quartz. Can she have been saying anything? If the dude is her brother, as she swears he is, she would back his game desperately. She wouldn't hesitate a minute to wring in a cold deck on me; and I'm not sure she has not done it. Things look mixed, and perhaps this delay may be all the better if it gives me a chance to find out what is in the wind. Pluggy will have a sweet time waiting if I don't get him word of the change of base."

With Sidney Darelle Leona was having rather an uncomfortable time. He was peevish, fretful and suspicious. The young lady was hardly out of his sight the whole day, and it was almost sundown when, seeing him drop into a doze she stole away for a little air and exercise.

She had now had a little experience in the climate of the Bar, and was aware that the evening air outside of the limit of the burg might very well prove unhealthy. There was no wandering this time to view the town from a distance. She simply paced down the street, much to the gratification of the loiterers.

When she was nearly opposite the Quartz she was overtaken by Fairy Fan. Looking around at the sound of the light footstep the eyes of the two met, and then Fanny spoke.

"It is not too late for you to take the advice that I gave you when we first met, and perhaps you feel more like believing me now. I want to warn you again. If you are wise you will not join this intended excursion. To say nothing of the journey, which is rough and tiresome, there is special danger that you would hardly face if you could understand its nature."

"And as I hinted before, how do you know anything about it, unless you are a confederate? And if you are, how can I trust you?"

"You must be able to understand that strange people visit the Quartz, and while there they are not always cautious in their talk. What I overhear is generally kept safely locked in my soul. If it was simply a plot against your father I would leave him to protect himself when the time came. But with a woman it is different, as you may find out when it is too late."

"If your father has made up his mind, then, let him go. I have no proof of what I say; but if you start off on this insane ride, the result will prove itself."

"Thank you; but I care not to hear what you say you fancy. The arrangement has been made, and I will stick to my share of the project, even though I confess to you that it is against my own better judgment. Not that I am afraid of the dangers by the wayside—where my father goes I go also—but because I fought against the coming here from the first; and doubly fought against an investment that could only serve to keep us here. Bad Man's Bar may suit you, but to me it is worse than Pandemonium. Were it not for duty, millions would not keep me here a day. You have had a chance to see some of the merry-making that has greeted my arrival—and I am not sure but what your brain planned it. Was it one of your heelers who, last night, as Hair Trigger Tom, took such an affectionate interest in my welfare? I half suspect that it was. What sane man would act in such a way without a reason? Beware! You may interfere once too often."

As Miss Fanny said nothing, she continued her oration until she wound up in something of a fury.

Fan now interrupted her, though all the time keenly watching. When the tirade was over, she spoke calmly.

"I am inclined to think, if you were less jealous of my supposed influence with Egbert Shaw, you would listen more prudently to my warning. You are widely mistaken. Some day I may be able to prove it to you. I will only say now, and for the last time—let the governor alone."

Miss Fanny turned away, and Leona did not attempt to prevent her. The daughter of a million had gone too far already, though she might have a curiosity to know more of the woman who seemed trying to be her friend.

About a dozen paces away she met another

person who did not often seem inclined to serious conversation.

It was the light and airy Mr. Hart Hawkins.

He touched his hat carelessly.

"Been talking to the duchess of the deck, have you? Remarkably fine young lady that, and as chuck-full of wisdom as any one I ever met. From all I hear, it wouldn't be a half bad plan if I were to sit at her feet awhile and learn understanding, for she has a wrinkle or two about the tiger that I never caught on to. She would make a good looking mother-in-law for a nice little lady; wouldn't she now?"

"I can't say that I altogether understand you; but if, in a general way, you wish to warn me against her, the caution is needless. I believe that she hates me, and I think I know the reason why."

"That's just where you are 'way off. I've never hated anybody in her life. That wouldn't be professional. And if my eyes are worth anything, which they usually are, I should say that she was trying to get on your good side. When a young lady deliberately pours ten thousand dollars or more into the hands of an elderly gentleman, she frequently has a reason for it. Look out for your father, my friend. If he's anything of a marrying man, I'm afraid that he's all gone."

With his usual easy impudence Mr. Hawkins strolled by her side; and made this astounding declaration with as much coolness as though he was saying the airiest of trifles.

The announcement really took Leona's breath away, wildly improbable as, at first blush, it seemed.

"Ten thousand dollars!" she finally exclaimed: "I do not understand you."

"Neither would half the Bar—because they never dealt faro for a living. There's such a thing as leading an angel on; but that wasn't what she was up to when she sprung the cards. If it was I'm a bald-headed Dutchman, and don't know the rudiments of the game. It was some little time before you came in; and of course the old gentleman hasn't mentioned it; but all the same it is so. Maybe Eg. Shaw is in the game, and maybe he isn't; but she intends to corral the Darelle shakels and quit cards."

"But this idea of yours is too wild too improbable. And even if it were so I cannot understand why you should tell me of it—a y more than that you should take our part last night—as you certainly did. For that service I am listening to you more patiently than I otherwise would."

"Oh, you, Miss Darelle, are reason enough. Most any one in the Bar would be pleased to tell you all they see. Trouble is they don't any of them see much further than their noses, and it took a brother professional to see to the bottom of this one thing though, Miss Darelle."

Eye and voice put in a more sober shading and for the time being he was as serious as a sexton.

"There is a report in town that you intend to go along with the party to inspect the Isabella."

"You have no idea what a contract you are undertaking. If you will take my word for it that little journey will be more than unsafe. You had better not try it. If you do, I'll vouch for it that you come to grief. Just how I can't say; but I know it. And if I had any influence with your father—like the governor seems to have, for instance—I would advise him to get out of here as soon as possible. He has too much coin to be loitering around Bad Man's Bar. Eg. Shaw seems to be at the head of the responsible business here; but there are a lot of responsible business men around here who carry on their operations behind a screen. When they begin getting in their work the governor, even, can't save you."

"I know it, I know it," responded Leona wildly. "I have warned him, but when the mad fit is on him there is no hope or help; he will go his own way, if it takes him to the bitter end."

"Terribly set, is he? Then I don't know exactly what you are to do. When I can be of any service, just order me into the ranks. I can always carry my end; and my pard, if he is shy and silent, is a mighty good man; and he thinks and acts just as I tell him. You might find worse backing. But look out for

this journey into the mountains. I know something about the Isabella, of old, and I haven't a doubt there's a heap big money in it; but somehow it's always been unlucky. The outsider that buys in gets left; and there's been enough bloodshed over it to float a Mississippi steamboat. Yes, and sink her to the smoke-stacks. There will be ghosts and goblins out there—the very ones that you don't want to see. Take my advice and stay out."

"You seem very bent on keeping me away from the place, and I will believe from an unselfish reason; but if father's health allows of it he will take the journey and I must go. Better to risk all that you have said, and more, than remain alone, where neither one's life nor liberty is safe. I own I shrink from it, but what can I do? I would feel much safer did I know that you would be with us. Could you not go?"

"Thank you kindly. I would as soon as not, and a little sooner; but I am afraid that your father and Boutelle might think I was an interloper, while I know that Shaw would—and perhaps much more. He would have Boutelle laying in with him in no time to lay me out. Yet, if I was sure you meant it—"

"I do, I do! With such dangers as I have heard more than hinted at the more the merrier."

"You couldn't get the old gentleman to give me a bid, could you? If he would it would simplify matters about my wringing in. Of course, after what I have said you know that you are at my disposal."

"I will see, though that need make no difference. I have some rights as well as the rest of them, I am your debtor, as I have already said; and if I choose to introduce a friend into the party he must be received as such."

She stamped her little foot petulantly, and looked at Hart as though she meant: "If I say so who shall say no?"

"Very true, and all I am looking at is the unpleasant predicament I should be placed in if Eg. Shaw, or some of the rest should begin to put on frills. I can't resent because they are your friends, and it would break my heart to hold in."

"You shall be met fairly, that I warrant you, and I tell you frankly, though in confidence, that I ask you partly because you do not like Egbert Shaw. He seems to be our friend, but I do not, cannot, altogether trust him. I fear that he means to take advantage of my father; though I have been his friend from the first. If you were with us he would hardly care to attempt to fleece him at cards. Say nothing of this to any one. I will let you know when it is decided to start and you can arrange accordingly. Will you bring your friend with you?"

She spoke low and hurriedly. Perhaps their conversation had lasted longer now than she deemed prudent.

"Well, scarcely, if the pasteboards are to be barred out, and you cannot guarantee heavy fighting. He's not exactly the man for a social little tea-fight. He understands cards and he understands pistols; but the ways of good society, and the delights of cheerful conversation are rather unknown to him. He'd be a kind of a death's head at the feast. Why, the boys call him Silent Sam, and I've known him not to open his mouth, except for the reception of necessities for a week. And yet, if there is to be any cutting or slashing, and wicked shooting, he'd come in mighty handy. If you want him, if you really want him, you can have him, too."

"You frighten me when you talk of what may happen, though it is no more than I ought to expect. Bring him, bring him. Is there not a camp near by, a straggling little town, that he might be seeking? That would be an excuse. You could even let him remain in it if he was not needed. He would at least be within call when you wanted him. And I would feel still safer. Already, you see, I am beginning to rely on you. Oh, their warnings have not gone for nothing. I shall be doubly protected. Will he come?"

"Certainly, certainly, if you say so. You're running the balk now, and till you lay down the box I'll never think about pulling another card. Excuse me, miss, but I mean that, say what you want you will have it. When you need a friend to tie to, Hart Hawkins is very much at your service."

"Thanks, thanks. You see how I have trusted you. Good-evening, now. When I know what is decided on you shall hear from me again. I feel at least a little easier since I know that I can rely on you. And you will not find me altogether ungrateful to either you or your friend, though for the present I would sooner you would not explain matters to him as they are. I can confide in you; but my troubles and fears I feel like keeping sacred from the whole world."

"Not a whisper, even to Sam. I am as silent as a hole in the ground. *Au revoir*! I hope I shall soon see you again."

She smiled and nodded, and went her way.

"Really," thought Mr. Hawkins, "I am not certain that my divinity is as big a fool as she looked. It looked as though Egbert was coming down the home-stretch a length ahead and hard pulled; but if she hasn't recognized him for a ringer and filed an objection I'm Yawcub Hoopnagle's aunt's third-cousin. But what does she think of me? Ahem! Playing both ends against the middle, and thinks she has a sure thing. Heigh-ho, Hart, my boy! you are just wasting more time over a bit of divinity that you could bet rocks is not half as big an angel as she seems. The confounded little schemer! I wish I could get at her inside plot. One would think an heiress to a million—they say the old man's worth that—would have no inside wheels to turn, out here in the wilderness. But catch them when you can and every one of them has a scheme. Wouldn't Sam talk profanely in meeting if he knew that I was going to make him a henchman of the fair Leona. He thinks because I've been swinging soft and low that I've given up hopes. Oh, no, I'm just waiting to get near the wire and then come with a rush. Of course, as usual, I'll be left; but what's the difference as long as a man has the benefit of glorious anticipation?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOU MAY HOPE."

SIDNEY DARELLE, in spite of his shaky looks and occasional periods of exhaustion, always showed that he had plenty of recuperating power by coming up fresh and smiling with as much suddenness as he took to his bed. The next morning, just when the colonel began to feel like sulking, and Egbert Shaw was going to start on an expedition to his own property, the Phenix, a message reached them, saying that Darelle had so recovered that he was quite himself again, and that, if it was not too late to make arrangements, he would like to start that day on the contemplated trip.

Rather sudden notice for the governor it was, since his hands were full of business, and he had his preparations to make, but he was one of those men who move promptly and are seldom taken aback. He replied at once that he would be at the Happy Home in an hour with a pair of extra riding-horses. If Mr. Darelle felt equal to a thirty-mile ride, it would be perhaps pleasanter than by the stage, which made slow progress, and had an uncertain schedule.

He made this proposition in good faith, though his half-formed idea was that the old gentleman might vibrate from stage to horseback, or that he might be turned over to Colonel Boutelle, leaving Leona to the special care of himself.

A message found some one else also.

Hart Hawkins, lounging around in an after-breakfast siesta, in the chance of an interview with Miss Darelle, received by the hands of the only female attendant the Happy Home could boast of, a note in a delicate feminine chirography, which he was sure, on sight, that he recognized.

He gave very little sign of exaltation until the Teutonic damsel had pocketed her coin and disappeared.

"Looks like business," he remarked, as he opened the envelope daintily. "Can it be possible that, in the language of the vulgar, I have made a mash? Or is it—whew! Horseback! Would like my company, but if it's not convenient, I can take the stage, and join them at Small Hopes Gulch. She has the geography of the country down fine, and seems to have a faint suspicion as to the limited facilities for equestrian exercises that this one-horse burg enjoys. Stage? Of course I'll go in the stage if I can't go on

horseback; but she's forgotten that Sam and I came prancing in on our own chargers, and as luck has been moderately good, we haven't had occasion to pawn the equines, and will come prancing up to take our position on the right center.

"At least, I will. It's good enough that I started Sam off on a prospecting tour an hour or so ago. He has been wanting a change of climate ever since we arrived, and now he's got it, I hope he will be satisfied. Ha, ha! He won't be off his base and whooping mad when the cavalcade gets in just behind him. I must see that Nancy is ready on time."

Promptly as the governor's horses were drawn up in front of the Happy Home did Mr. Hawkins emerge, radiant in unexceptionable costume, and a look of expectancy on his face.

Then Egbert Shaw appeared, along with Colonel Boutelle; and Sidney Darelle and daughter a moment or two later.

"Sorry if we kept you waiting—ough! But a woman is a woman, and Leona is like all the rest of her sex. I am going to throw the blame on her this time."

"And I shall accept it without a murmur, for my fault it really was. Governor Shaw, Colonel Boutelle, Mr. Hawkins. Perhaps you are acquainted."

Then, in a charmingly rendered aside to the governor, she added:

"Father has his expert—I must have mine. He may not know much about mines and mining, but he has been recommended to me as competent authority in regard to draw poker. He will keep me apprised of the chances of the game."

It was an open question whether to smile or be angry, but after a trifling hesitation the governor chose the former.

"Evidently you are a lady of resources. I cannot blame you for not altogether trusting me, and though time will bring my justification, I accept my punishment. That I do it gracefully my treatment of such a man as Hawkins attests."

And after that, though Sidney Darelle did give an extra cough that hardly had the note of his customary one, and looked grimly at the young man, he offered no audible objection, but climbed into his saddle with an air that showed that if he was a little feeble he had at least been there before.

In watching him Shaw lost his chance to assist Miss Leona. Hawkins had his hand ready, and from it she floated into the saddle lightly as a feather. As, however, the two men took different views of the mooted question of "near side" and "off side," each happened to be satisfied that he had the post of honor. Miss Darelle rode away with an escort on either side, following close behind Colonel Boutelle and the old gentleman.

Although as yet the road-agents had not made their appearance on the trail to Small Hopes Gulch there was no telling how soon they would, and the gentlemen were conspicuously around. If they kept as bright a lookout as was to be expected it would take a little army to get away with them.

In spite of Hart Hawkins as a discordant element the little party rode along quite pleasantly for several hours, over a trail that was by no means difficult.

Then the governor called a halt.

"We are coming to the worst bit of the journey, except the bit around the Gulch, and from there to the mountain pocket. As there is a spring here, I suggest we make a stop. If the bearer hasn't lost his way or met with some accident I'll have a lunch here soon that will be better than what you can find at Ab. Nye's half-way shanty, and this is a good deal pleasanter place to take it. After that I guess the stage will be along, and perhaps it would be better if Darelle were to climb over the hog-back in that. I have engaged him a seat, anyhow. If he don't choose to take it there will be nothing lost. If he does we will follow on leisurely, and be in supporting distance at the worst spots. On the other side of the range, if he feels rested, he can mount again. How does that strike you, Darelle?"

"Well enough, ough; though Leona had better ride with me. I am not as old—ough—as I look, and I'll wager when we get to the Gulch—ough—she will be the more tired of the two."

The governor smiled as they dismounted.

"She can take her choice; but you hardly realize what young blood will stand. Ah, I think I hear my man in the distance now."

It was a beautiful spot for a camping-ground; and hardly had Leona, under the guidance of Shaw, finished viewing it when his man arrived, bringing with him the hamper containing the promised lunch. And his man, of course, was Pluggy Becker.

There was no use of being a man of wealth and the most prominent citizen of a brick camp without being able to get up in style such a little thing as a wayside lunch. The governor surpassed himself. Becker, furnished up for the occasion, looked as unconscious as though he had never played draw with two of the party, and assisted in the usual handy way in which he took hold of everything. An hour or so passed quite cheerfully, and then the stage rumbled into view.

"Make up your mind now, Mr. Darelle. Remember that you have the mine business at the end of the ride; and then the journey back."

"True enough, governor; true enough. Perhaps—ough—you are right. Yet it looks like a chance for a lonesome captivity. Could we not all take the conveyance? I see there is only one man inside."

"You will find that two makes quite a load when you are reaching the summit. Yet, if you hesitate about going alone I suppose—"

"Count me in for company," suddenly interposed Hawkins. "I'll resign my place to the colonel, hitch Nellie on behind, and make things as agreeable as I know how. If we don't like it we can get out and walk."

"Very well," responded Darelle, somewhat to the surprise of the rest; and the stage was hailed, the arrangement carried out. Sedately followed Leona, with her two gallants, while Becker remained, gathering up the fragments.

The colonel was not a very attentive cavalier. He was thinking of the development of the Isabella, and the fifty thousand Darelle might be induced to put in it. He touched his horse with the spur, in one of his abstracted moods, and darted on ahead, leaving the two alone.

"Leona, why do you still doubt me? If life itself was needed for the work I would still protect you and your father. Can you not believe in me?"

"I do, I do!" she passionately answered.

"Too much so. It is because I know that my own judgment is no more to be trusted than I lean on another. I have vowed I will protect him—for gratitude and the sake of the right, if not for love. He is too great a prize to leave unguarded."

"You are a greater," answered the governor, solemnly. "It may be a sin to say so now, when sympathy must be sweet, and what seems disinterested friendship a boon; but I must say it, even at the loss of your respect. Cannot you see that for you I would do all, risk all, be any and everything you could wish me? There, I have said enough. Now, tell me anything but that you hate me."

He had spoken rapidly, warmly, not too much to give offense, enough, with the look he gave her, to show what he meant.

"Hush," she said. "Something in my looks must have encouraged you. You forget that for the present I am wedded to my father—that his service must come first of all."

"Am I right? You do give me hope. With two servants he would be better served than with one."

"Have you not seen that if we went counter to his wishes in a moment he would have no servant at all? Then, what would become of me, here?"

"You would have me. In course of time he would come back to us. If not—the world is wide—I have wealth for both—we could live without him. Why should I have to stand twice the hazard of the die? Answer, now, and tell me if I have hope."

"Do you speak from the bottom of your soul when you say all that?"

She drew her horse in on the trail, and once more looked him in the eyes with that strange gaze that seemed to madden. For the moment he meant all he had said and more. He had never seen any one quite like

her. There were possibilities for the deepest depths of passion; and yet there was a calm steadfastness in her manner that charmed him still more. And just now she was very beautiful.

"I do, I do. Test me any and every way you choose and you will see."

"Then," said Leona, extending her hand, "you may hope. We will wait and work together."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BAD BREAK.

THE passenger already in the stage scarcely noticed the entrance of Hawkins and the old gentleman. He kept his corner, glanced carelessly at them, and was silent.

When the stage was once more in motion, Darelle inspected him with some curiosity.

"Excuse me—ough—but your face is somewhat familiar. Have we met before, and if so, where? I am—ough—so forgetful, but I do not want to give offense by it."

"No offense," growled the other. "Guess I made my profit out of the meeting. I was in the stage with you, on the way to the Bar. The agents were so set on you that they never noticed me when I jumped into the gulch and hid. After the picnic the two outsiders and I walked into camp same as you did, but we weren't enough importance to notice, and nobody asked any questions. That's where you met me."

"Sure enough, ough—sure enough. Well, well, Mr. Hawkins, do you know anything about the Isabella, and the man that runs it? How did he come—ough—to get it? It's not his find, is it?"

I know a heap more about the Isabella's history than Colonel Boutelle does, but I'm not sure I could answer all your questions. I wasn't much more than a boy when that strike was made—seven or eight years ago, anyhow; and maybe more. A man by the name of Carey went down here with a pard and hit it rich."

"Ah, so, so! And Carey was sometimes known as Hair Trigger Tom? Eh? Ough!"

"By George, you're right, though I don't know where you picked up that bit of information. And his partner's name was Edgar Otis. They seemed to pull together tip-top, for some time. Then Carey quit, and Otis ran the shebang for all that was in it. The claim seemed to peter out at last, and they do say he salted it well before he sold to the Dutchman. He had taken a fortune out of it before that, though. Afterward some owners were shot, and some went crazy, and some gave it up as a bad job. The only man left with faith in it, is this Boutelle who won it against a thousand dollars in the pot, and claims in a quiet way that he has found the lead where it dropped. If he has there's rocks again. If not, I wouldn't pull for it at twenty-five dollars, coppered on the queen and she alone in the hotel."

"Um, ah! And this Edgar Otis. What became of him?"

"That—I'll never tell, though I suppose he went back East. I saw him on the road going, and haven't heard of him since."

"Thanks. And so the colonel indulged in a little draw?"

"You ought to know. You have seen him at it."

"Yes, yes, but not enough to judge. But that man who had a difficulty with us, the other night. He was the man who once owned a share in the mine, was he?"

"Not by a long shot. He never owned a share in anything. Reckon he stole the name, just like he'd steal the four aces, if he got the chance."

"You know—ough—why I came here?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, well. I needn't explain. But I will give you ten thousand dollars if you will find me the right Tom Carey, who had the share in the mine."

"Thanks for the offer; but I think I might get uncomfortably warm if I went to hunt him."

"Or I will give you five thousand dollars if you will bring me face to face with the Edgar Otis who was his partner."

"I'd hardly look for him in the other place, but I'm afraid that would be about as heavy a contract for the average man."

"But for you?"

"Well. I'm not so sure yet. Just stick

a pin in that offer. If it's on the square I may see you later."

"Very well, so it is in a reasonable time. Ough! The road is certainly getting remarkably bad."

True enough, progress was beginning to be slow, and the way rough. Conversation languished, Mr. Darelle huddling up in a corner with closed eyes, while Hawkins looked absently out at the trail, or covertly eyed the third passenger, with whom it scarcely seemed worth while to attempt to enter into conversation.

So the time wore on. The party in the rear must have loitered by the way, for they did not put in an appearance, and finally the stage reached the tumble-down cabin known as Ab Nye's half-way house.

Ordinarily, except when the stage was passing, the place was lonesome without limit, but to-day, to the surprise of the driver, there were signs of life and population.

"Suthin's wrong," he said, leaning down and addressing Hart Hawkins.

"There's three or four gerloots loungin' 'round. An' thar's one stranger ez lit out fur Small Hopes a-hossback three hours afore we did. Ther stage are a hummer, but it'd ska'ssly gain that fur in a squar' deal. Ther bridge over Devil Gulch are down, I'll bet a slug. You hear me?"

The bridge was down, as Hawkins found out in a very few moments. The stranger alluded to was Sam Loftus, and he was smoking a pipe and taking things easy in front of the shanty. He looked up without much animation, and nodded slowly.

"Found ther bridge bu'sted so it can't be got over ter-night, though thar's some gen'ous-minded galoots fixin' at it. Thort I'd come back an' see whar ther rest ov ther travelin' munity went to. You goin' ter stay hyar, er go back?"

"Whew! That puts the fat in the fire. I wanted to know something about the gulch when I got there. I don't believe in your chopping deals. If we open a bank and then find we ought to have gone our bottom dollar on short-cards, it'll be another Charley Shiffler lay-out. Ain't there any other way of getting to the Hopes?"

"Might, afore mornin'. Thar's a blind trail what they used ter use, 'bout thirty mile 'round. Ef yer say so I'll try it, an' you kin come on to-morrer. War' goin' an' then I thort I'd wait an' see what come in on ther stage. 'Tain't no use ter argy, I s'pose; but ther signs sez, go back. I've a yearnin' ter tetch ther left-hand upper corner ov old Hoopnagle's clock. But it's jest ez you're a-sayin', boss. I'm willin'."

"Thought you had got tired touching for luck. Your signs will break you all up yet. Anyhow, I'd like you to get to Small Hopes to-night and keep an eye on matters as I told you; but I didn't figure on the extra ride."

"Then I'm a-goin'. So long."

Sam quietly slouched away to get his horse.

He wasn't a loud talker, but he knew how to speak to a purpose; and he had got the lay of the trail he spoke of down very fine.

"I'm not exactly going back on an old pard," thought Hawkins; "but it's just as well to get him out of the way before the rest of the gang comes. He might cut up rusty at the last minute."

It seemed a little too much to ask Sam to meet the young lady for whom he had expressed such decided disapprobation, at Nye's. And he did not care to have Loftus a witness of his own carryings on with the lady aforesaid. If he saw the chance, he intended to make the running. It was with some satisfaction that he saw him disappearing down a narrow trace, while up the broader trail came the three missing equestrians.

Boutelle had lost his preoccupied look, and all were in the best of spirits. Their faces scarcely fell when they heard the announcement that they would either have to return or remain in the cabin over night. Hawkins thought he saw Leona give one glance at the back of the man vanishing down the bridle-path, but he was not sure. Anyhow, that made no difference.

"How far is the bridge, anyway?" asked the governor.

"Three or four miles," responded Colonel Boutelle.

"It is one of the improvements I have had put in, and I could have sworn it would stay

for all time. Either there has been a cloud-burst, or else it has been tampered with. If it was not so far, I would say we should all go on and take a look at it. Probably some of the men from the Isabella are out fixing at it."

"You gentlemen go," said Leona. "Father and I will remain here, rest, and take in the chances of making this old shanty comfortable for the night. A woman's hands can do a great deal."

"All right. I want to see my men anyhow. And perhaps we may find it in shape, after all."

"We're with you," added Hawkins, who felt the necessity for playing to Leona's lead. "They will be safe enough here under Ab's Winchester, and we'll be back before they have a chance to get lonesome."

The governor would have held back, but a look from Leona decided him. They all went off together.

Nye was scarcely as bad-looking as his wayside hostelry, and there were four rooms in the cabin, small as it seemed from the outside.

As Mr. Darelle expressed a desire to sleep, and looked exhausted, he was given a shake-down. Scarcely had he closed his eyes when Leona glided from the room, and seeing that no one was in sight, darted down the mountain trail taken by Sam Loftus.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONJUGAL ENDEARMENTS.

THE road was narrow and rough, so that Sam Loftus made but slow progress at the best. It was only the turns in the trail that had shut him out of sight so soon.

When he had gone half a mile—perhaps less—he halted, dismounted, tied his horse to a convenient sapling, and sat down by the roadside. He seemed in no hurry to reach Small Hopes; and, in fact, muttered audibly:

"Rush er no rush, pard'll hev ter wait. 'Tain't often I hev biz; an' gen'rally I'm slow on ther talk. Reckon I'll hev ter reel off a few yards ter-night, though. I ain't jest sure how it'll come, but ther signs is right, an' ther balance'll be 'long afore day-break if I hev ter go back to ther shanty. Ter think ov him a-foolin' me—Sam Loftus—his own pard. But that's ther way. When calico gits afore yer eyes. A man ain't got no more use fur pards, common sure, er anything. I'll stop it ef I go dead bu'st."

A light footstep approaching never made him lift his gaze, though he heard it beyond a doubt. There was a little flush on the upper part of his face telling that much.

"Well, sir, silent as usual? And yet I fancied you might have something to say to the woman you have wronged."

Then he looked up, and said simply:

"I thought the wrongin' was all on ther other side."

"You did? That's like a man. Now what is it? You see I'm not going to beat around the bush, or try to deceive you. The moment I saw you I knew it was no use. Why have you followed me here? What do you mean to do?"

"I haven't follered yer—I'd on'y be too glad ter put a thousand miles atwixt us. It's just blind luck az we met, whar I'll sw'ar I never expected ter see yer."

"But still you don't answer. I am not caring why or how we came together, but I never saw that look in your eyes without it's meaning something. We have got to come to an understanding right here and now. And I must have a safe guarantee that my future will not be interfered with. What sort of a one are you willing to give me?"

"I ain't givin' guarantees, ez a gin'ral thing; an' I don't see no call fur it in this case. It's one frum *you* I want. What devilish sorter game hev you bin playin'?"

Silent Sam spoke slowly, as though with an effort, and answered her question by another one of his own.

"No game at all have I been playing, but I have come to my own again, and am living the life of an honest woman. Had I never met you I could be happy for all my future."

"Well, that ortn't to interfere. Spoon you jest take me to that father ov yours an' say, 'Hyar's my husband; pervide fur us both.' I reckon he'd be willin'."

"You villain! That is what you want me to do. You think you have me in your

clutches and you mean now to market the secret. If I will not pay, you will go to my father."

"Ruthyer a healthy sort ov father. Can't say I ever heered ov him in ther old days when you thort thar war no one like Sam Loftus. Whar did yer find him, er did yer make him fur this 'casion only? Thar's suthin' queer 'bout it that I'll want him ter explain ef you don't."

"I told you nothing of my past life because I did not care to explain that I had fallen so low as to mate with one like you, though I had not then learned my own degradation since I did not yet know the vile-ness of your principles. When the time came that I did, I left you without a moment's hesitation. I did not go in search of my father, but he came for me. I have health, beauty, wealth and—"

"A husband!" added Sam, dryly.

"No! I have not! I will not have! I thought you were dead—I was sure of it. You are dead to me, and must stay so. Claim me at your peril. I swear to you that I will kill you."

"Then you hev got some game afoot, jest ez I knowed. Ef it ain't me ye'r torturin', it's sum one else. Reckon ye'r goin' fur my pard now, Hart Hawkins. I'll save him from sich a she-devil ez you ef it takes a wheel off."

"Hart Hawkins!" in profound contempt.

"A gambler! A beast of prey like yourself. What should I have to do with him?"

"Nothin'; but you will. Thar's Eg. Shaw, ther big gun ov the Bar. Yer hev bin makin' eyes at him; but he's another hawk, an' ef he kin clean out ther old man, he won't take a 'cumbrance, ter say nothin' ov ther fact thet he'll drop to yer afore he gits through, an' then, good-by ag'in. When he leaves yer you'll go back fur Hart, an' he's my pard. Ther truth hez got ter come out ter save him, an' ter open ther eyes ov an in-nercent old fool. Ef I kin prove ter him thet you robbed me of ten thousand dollars, an' lit out with a handsomer feller, maybe he'll watch out thet you don't play him ther same trick. I don't b'lieve much in ther father dodge; but true er not I'll put him on his guard, an' tell ther truth ter Hart, an' ther outsiders."

He spoke doggedly, not roticing the flaming wrath that was rising higher and higher in her face.

"If you dare!" she cried, bending over and shaking her shapely finger until it almost quivered against his cheek, while her eyes gleamed like coals.

"I reckon thar ain't nothin' I don't dare when it comes ter givin' you yer just dues."

Then!

There was a sudden, sharp report. Sam Loftus fell over backward, while Leona, with a smoking pistol in her hand, turned and fled back up the trail, unconscious of the face that had been, for a moment, turned toward her from among the bushes beyond.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE OUTLAWS MAKE AN EFFORT.

"THE report can hardly be heard from the shanty, and if so what matter. The boldest course is the best. It can be blamed on our friends, the road-agents. Perhaps it will be best to see one or two. I have not been gone twenty minutes. My return was cut off. I was hiding. Perhaps I can find another path by which to reach the place. At all events I am rid of him forever. Now to be heiress to a million. Failing that—perhaps—Egbert Shaw."

Such things as these Leona was running over in her mind, not confusedly though in haste, as she hurried up the trail, growing cooler with every step. She had thrust away the pistol, glanced at her hands to see that they were not stained, and was ready to defend herself to the last from any evil consequences of her desperate throw.

Yet she did give a start, and thrust her hand swiftly into her bosom when she came face to face with some one as hurriedly approaching. A second glance showed her that it was a woman—was Fairy Fan.

"Stop, stop, Miss Darelle, stop!" she exclaimed, though her voice was hardly above a whisper.

"Stand aside!" was the harsh answer. "Your jealous rage has followed me even here, but you make the mistake of your life—"

time if you attempt to interfere. Stand aside!"

"Listen to me. It is your own danger that I am telling you of. I did not come here to seek you, but to arrange for the ransom of my brother who was in the clutches of Longhand. I warned you against this journey. Your every movement has been watched, and even if you can make your way back to your father I doubt if you will find safety. Both of you are in danger. That cabin is no protection."

"Then why delay me here?" questioned Leona, recovering more and more, and meeting Fan with the smiling scorn that she had always shown her.

"Are you in league with them?"

"Hush! Lower! This path is watched beyond. The outlaws are reconnoitering Ab. Nye's cabin and will doubtless return this way. There is another more difficult, yet in it we may find safety. Come. Trust in me. I would save you if I could!"

Leona hesitated; and in that moment the precious time was lost that would have enabled them to glide unseen into the other trail. Fanny had darted away, but as the other lingered three men made their appearance, within a stone throw of the spot.

"Ha, ha! That's the beauty now!" rumbled the nearest. "Ain't makin' no mistakes this time. Ther right mutton by ther ear, fur rocks!"

He sprung as he spoke, even while a clear voice was ringing out:

"This way, run!"

Then he staggered back, hard hit, as Fan began to shoot.

"Doctored ag'in an' this time fer keeps."

"Hole on, Cracker, we're with yer!" shouted the ruffian known as Red Top, he and Abe shoving to the front with a suddenness that was in marked contrast to their slowness on a former occasion.

The fact was, then, there were three; now there were four, and the fourth man the best of the lot. He was in the path and noiselessly he sprung, and reaching over Fan's shoulders snatched her weapons from her hands before she could fire a second shot.

"Don't like to do it; but down you go."

As he spoke he dashed her to the ground in a senseless heap, and then bounded out into the broader trail.

"That's right, Red Top, don't give the little tiger cat a chance to show her claws. She'll bite deep enough if you do. Carry her off, and Abe and I will look after the Cracker. Knock her lightly on the head if she won't be quiet. I'll have her or her corpse this time. I'll swear it's the same woman. How are you, old man?"

The Cracker staggered to his feet, a look of pain on his brutal face as he felt his left shoulder, and winced at the touch.

"Drilled through an' through, but I don't guess it's the bone-yard this time. Curses on it, I knew she would shoot."

"Lean on me till you get your wind again. I'll stick to you if you get faint, and I'll make it up to you in hard coin. This time there's no mistake about it, if they haven't got back to the house, yet, and that shot don't bring 'em. We'll take the chance of that, though. There's mighty big money in it—twenty thousand dollars sure—and if this court knows herself there's more in it besides. When I make the cards I calculate to go for all that's in the bank. I'm all wool, and a yard wide."

Red Top obeyed orders literally, and Abe, seeing that his help was not needed with the Cracker, gave his assistance. Between them they hurried Leona away, the other two following slowly, leaving Fanny where she lay.

Scarcely had they disappeared when she began to stir, to move restlessly, to rise.

As she crouched on the ground, with her hands pressed to her temples, trying to realize what had happened, some one came stumbling down the mountain-side.

"Aw, weally. What has been going on heah?"

It was the redoubtable Wellington Woburn, turned up once more.

"Aw, Fanny, as true as gospel! What has happened to her? Something dreadful!"

"I sh'ud grin" chimed in another voice. "Bin intervooin' Colonel Longhand, er I'm a liar. An' got ther tough end ov ther talk. Gosh, yes, whv warn't I hyar. What's ther racket? Which way did they go?"

Woburn's captivity seemed to have broken him all apart, as he did not notice the interruption, but wrung his hands in silent dismay.

The voice had an effect on the young lady. She pointed toward the trail.

"That way they went. There were four of them, and they have taken Miss Darelle. Go and get help. One of them was wounded. They cannot go fast and they may be overtaken. Take the other trail up to the cabin. Go! Will you stand here while they carry her away. You must have help quickly or it will be too late."

"Four ov 'em you say, an' one of 'em wounded? It's ska'ssly wuth while ter waste time goin' to ther house ef there's on'y three ov 'em. Ef yer plugged one that takes off two, an' ther gal's good fur another, that leaves one fur me, an' I'm goin' fur his back hair. Gosh, yes."

And Tommy Tough, with a revolver in either hand, started off in hot pursuit of the outlaws.

He had not gone very far before he heard the rattle of pistols not far ahead, and he redoubled his speed, wondering what was the matter.

Hart Hawkins was the matter.

Leona had scarcely quitted the spot when he came cautiously sliding down the steep mountain-side, looking warily around to see if possible who had discharged the weapon he had heard.

He came upon Sam Loftus, lying where he fell.

"Good heavens, pard! Are you dead? There's been murder here, and I've had my pard killed with my cursed foolishness over a woman. Look up, Sam. Don't say you've cashed in. You're worth all the calves that ever drew breath. Answer me, pard, and say that you're not dead."

Silent Sam was very silent now. He lay still and quiet.

"Let's look the matter over," continued Hawkins, serious for once in his life. "I can't believe that you're gone up the flume. You wouldn't leave me. I've seen so many just as still as he is get up and dance; he'll do it, too. So. Shot through the lungs, as I'm a sinner; but he's living yet, I swear."

A feeble groan attested the truth of the assertion, and without more delay Hawkins snatched his knife out and began cutting the clothing away from the wound.

He fingered the spot softly, turned the wounded man over gently, and his face grew brighter. He deftly plugged and bandaged the hole, and then looked up, rapidly debating whether he should leave him here and go for help, or whether he, alone, should attempt to carry him up to the half-way house.

It was at this time that the outlaws with their captive came hurrying down.

"Hair Trigger Tom! This is your work, is it, you scoundrel? Draw, if you dare. There's a finger on the trigger in front of you."

With the utmost celerity the little gambler whipped out a revolver, and brought it to bear in deadly aim.

"Hold on there, Tom, I've got the call and this time I mean to take it, but I never shot a man without warning, and I can't shoot you. Pull and drop."

Counterfeit or not this Hair Trigger Tom was wonderfully quick with his tools. His hands moved like a flash, there were two reports so blended that they sounded as but one, and two men spinning round and round and dropping together.

"Awful brimstone!" exclaimed Red Top, dropping his prisoner. "Ther boss *hes* got it!"

"An' I've got you!" shouted Tommy Tough, springing upon him from the rear.

"That's one fur fun an' two fur bizzness. What's goin' on hyar?"

The three shots made lively music as they rattled out in rapid succession, and none of them seemed entirely wasted. Red Top fell, the Cracker winced again, while Abe bounded away with the speed of a stricken deer.

CHAPTER XXX.

A RATTLING RACKET—FAIRY FAN GROWS CONFIDENTIAL.

LEONA looked earnestly down at the bodies which Tommy Tough was examining for

signs of life. Sam Loftus was again still, and she doubted not that he was dead.

It seemed to her that this attack of the outlaws was her salvation, though she did not understand the presence of Hawkins on the scene until Fairy Fan and her brother came running up. Then she believed that the faro queen had sent both to her rescue.

"Ain't ez clean a haul ez it mou't 'a' bin, but ther ketch'll do fur dry weather. Gosh, yes. Hyar's three stiffs fur sure, an' about ez many cripples. Would yer, eh?" He cried, as Red Top, twisting around and to his knees, tried to draw his revolver. "Lay thar, and be quiet!"

He brought a swinging blow down back of the outlaw's ear that tumbled him over without much sense left.

Then Tommy, with handkerchiefs and suspenders, rapidly bound the ankles and wrists of the three agents, though Hair Trigger Tom seemed beyond the need of it, propped Hart Hawkins up, and addressed himself to the young ladies.

"Guess that settles it. We've saved ther wu'st ov ther gang, an' thar won't be no more monkeyin' 'round ther band-wagon. Gosh, no. But you folks hed better look a leetle out thet ther balance don't kim back, an' ther dude, ez ther best runner, hed better git up to Ab's like a streak o' lightnin' an' git help fur ther wounded. I'm er modest man meself, an' can't bear ther smell ov blood, so I'll jist take ter ther bresh, an' scout 'round after them ez got away, tell all the flummery ov 'graturlashum hez hed time ter die away. Jest tell 'em all Tommy done his duty. Gosh, yes."

He disappeared as he ceased speaking, hardly hearing the words with which Fairy Fan urged away Woburn—or Auburn, as his name should be pronounced—or the pit-a-pat of his footsteps up the trail. As for himself, he did not do much of the scouting around that he spoke of, for the moment that he could do so, he struck out into the narrower and more difficult path, along which he made his way with a speed that bid fair to double discount that made by Arlington Auburn.

"Gosh!" came suddenly from his lips, as he heard the noise of some one plunging downward toward him.

Before he could leap aside and conceal himself, he was face to face with the strolling fiddler, Uncle Daniel.

Tommy Tough's face only showed intense disgust at the meeting, but Uncle Daniel's lengthened into the wildest surprise.

"Hole on, thar, who—who be you?" he spluttered, seemingly taken all aback.

"I'm Tommy Tough, from Red Bend; don't yer draw, for I've got yer kivered. Hands up an' fingers empty. Now you know me?"

"You onmittergated liar from Liarsville. I'm Tommy Tough meself, an' you've stole my clothes. Yes, that's so. You're one ov ther gang, an' I'll take yer in er go ontew ther wet."

And with reckless strategy the stroller flung himself forward, turning two hand-springs in the direction of the redoubtable Tommy.

If his object was to confuse his aim the stroller might have saved himself the trouble. The revolvers of the imitation Tommy disappeared in a twinkling, and, as Uncle Daniel rose with outstretched arms to grasp him the tough from Red Bend shot out a straight hit.

"Ez I remarked afore, lay thar! Gosh! yes," mumbled Tommy, and leaping over the prostrate body, he shot up the trail with a rapidity that almost instantly took him out of sight.

For a few moments Uncle Daniel did lay there.

Then he rose and doggedly stumbled down the trail until he came in sight of the little picnic Tommy and the rest had provided for him.

As he came upon the scene, others were arriving by the other road—Colonel Boutelle, Egbert Shaw, Fanny, the dude, and Sidney Darelle in a state of great excitement. He flung his arms around Leona, and trembling in every joint, stared around.

It was an ugly little exhibition, anyhow, though everybody else took it with more or less coolness.

"We, we, can do no more good here,"

he said, forgetting to cough, and drawing Leona softly away. "Come with me to the house. See. Others are arriving, I declare, I—I am all broken up. Foolish girl, to run such risks. But it shall be the last time."

She offered no objections, since then and there she did not care to have the subject of her absence discussed. Together they hurried toward the house. She had already thanked Hawkins with much effusion, and there was nothing further for her to do then; and something to think of elsewhere.

The governor and the rest had considerable experience in gun-shot wounds, and the first thing was to examine the wounded.

"I'm doing all right," said Hawkins, "but just look my pard over. He wasn't dead a minute ago, and if you give him half a show he'll pull through yet. What the—blazes is the reason I've got to be lying here, when I ought to be looking after him? Get him up to the house first and then help me along. I'll nurse him through—I swear I will!"

"An' you killed him?" queried Uncle Daniel, touching the defunct Carey with the toe of his ragged old boot.

"It's so reported," answered Hawkins, with a gentle sigh, "and it's the only consolation left me in this vale of tears."

"Then yer shot him in ther back," mercilessly continued the fiddler. "An' I'll bet a heap ov rocks thar ain't a load missin' outen yer sixes. Ye'r a mighty good leetle man; but I've observed yer spend too much time a-talkin' an' dwell too long on yer aim. Ef not, I want ter know. Yes. That's so."

"Oh, glory! Now I lay me!" feebly exclaimed Hawkins, in dying disgust, and he dropped easily backward, fainting from pain and disappointment.

After that the wounded were carried up to the house, and arrangements made to bury the defunct outlaw.

"I allers s'picioned he war Longhand," grieved the fiddler, "an' now, when it's too late, I know it. Yes, that's so."

At the same time he looked sharply enough at the others, in search, perhaps, of the counterfeit Tommy Tough, and as he set down the end of the litter on which they had carried the Cracker, his face showed that he was thinking deeply.

The presence of Hawkins and the rest was easily accounted for. The party had met the foreman of the Isabella, who gave them all the particulars in regard to the bridge which they expected to get in shape for use early in the morning. In addition, he brought the intelligence that to all appearance it had been tampered with for a purpose. He suspected that the intention was to detain the stage over night at Ab Nye's.

Knowing that the colonel was in search of money he suspected that he might be the passenger specially marked, and he announced that he had ordered some of the men up, so that if an attack on the cabin was made by the road-agents they would meet with a warm reception.

They all started back for the Half-way House, the governor going first, Hawkins after an interval, while Boutelle lingered, talking with his superintendent, about the latest developments at the mine.

It took some time to clear up the wounded, arrange the prisoners, and get over the hubbub of excitement. After that came a consultation as to food for the multitude. It was found that between the stock of provisions that Nye had on hand, and the remnants of the lunch brought up by Becker, the travelers would fare decidedly better than they expected and the idea of returning to the Bar was given up. When the detachment from the Isabella arrived the prisoners could be further taken care of, and it looked as though all further danger for the night was over.

Supper brought out Mr. Darelle and his daughter, wonderfully refreshed.

"After all, there is a load off my mind," he admitted.

"That ruffian has been following me ever since I left Red Bend, and he and his men seemed so utterly reckless that it was no wonder I began to fear. In some way he must have discovered what a large amount of money and collaterals I had about me. It is imprudent; but what is the use of having it if one can't use it as he wants?"

"Well, aw, wouldn't it be better, aw, to

leave this heaven-fawsaken country, aw?" asked the dude, in considerable earnest, whereat the rest laughed.

He had a story of his own to tell, but as it took time, with his drawl, to get over the ground, Fairy Fanny told it for him. The little woman seemed quite subdued by the dangers and deaths she had met along the trail, and spoke more quietly than usual.

Woburn, as his drawl pronounced the name, had been brought thither by the outlaws, who had sent Fan warning to be in that neighborhood with the ransom. His idiotic manner had caused them to view him with contempt.

They had brought him thitherward by night without much care. As a result he slipped off in the darkness, hid in the mountains, and the next day very nearly wandered back into their arms. That was his story, as he had given it to Fanny, and as she retailed it to the company.

"What in the name of common sense ever brought him here, anyhow?" asked the colonel, looking him over as though he had escaped from a menagerie.

"And you don't mean to say that he's your brother? If so I wouldn't own him."

"He's like the singed cat you read about. He's a good deal better than he looks," laughed the little woman, somewhat emerging from the cloud.

"If he can't shoot—and I'm not so sure that he hasn't picked that up among his other accomplishments—he has more muscle than you'd think for, and if he don't pull the cards at faro he has nerve enough to give the tiger a hard tussle now and then. Oh, he's not the best brother in the world, but he's all I've got, and I'll speak a good word for him."

"But what brought him here? Back East they have that kind, and he was lost in the crowd."

The colonel's voice was low and confidential. When he had nothing else on hand he had no objection to chatting with the handsome queen of the Quartz.

"To see me, of course. How could I know that there was too much water about him to mix with the oil of Bad Man's Bar? I hadn't seen him for half a dozen years, not since I came West with Barmore's Combination. And then he picked up another idea along the road," she added glancing at Leona. "I hope he has dropped that. And as he was shrewd enough to save me ten thousand dollars last night I have some right to admire him."

"Well, I hope he will get through all right with Mr. Becker; but that worthy chief seemed to be very much in earnest about getting even."

"If Mr. Becker's not satisfied with what he got I shall interview him myself, and I'll come with the sixes, and I'll shoot to kill. I'll stop that foolishness the moment it begins."

The young lady spoke confidently and firmly, and as if in answer they heard a whoop outside.

"I think," said the colonel with a smile, "that the foolishness has begun."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE AUBURN FAMILY PLAY AS PARTNERS.

THE trouble with Pluggy Becker was that, being a recognized chief—his subserviency to the governor being a thing unknown or unnoticed—he had a certain reputation to sustain. That reputation did not allow him to accept his defeats; and yet it forbade his attacking the dude without warning.

Inasmuch as he caused him to leave the Bar he did not feel quite so bitter, yet the sight of the young man from Boston was about the same as a red rag to an enraged bull. He lowered his horns and went at him. When Arlington Auburn strolled out of the cabin he went into trouble.

"I tole yer we two couldn't stay in the same deestric, an' I mean it, every time. What yer doin' sneakin' round hyar? It's run er fight. Hev yer got yer weepins ready?"

Becker bristled up to him with his revolver ready; and this time he meant there should be no chance to get away with him.

"Mr. Becker, killing people, aw, is your profession. It, aw, is not mine. I don't like to. And—aw—er—it hurts. If you—aw—become violent I shawll throw myself on the pwotec-

tion of the pawty. I can stwike, aw, befoah you can think; and no doubt shoot, aw, just as well as you, but I am weally afwaid to let my passions wise. Suppwise, aw, I *did* kill you?"

"You kill me! You've talked that way before," roared Pluggy, raising his pistols.

Crack!

Crack!

Away went the hammers of his pistols, while on the porch above Miss Fanny appeared, a smoking revolver in her hand.

"Up with your hands, you cowardly villain, and be glad those bullets didn't go through your skull. He can shoot all around you every day in the year; but because he won't you are trying to dig your own grave. I'll take a hand in this, and you know me, I am no chief, but I'm bad when I start. If you force me to it you are dead meat."

"Allow me," said another voice, and Egbert Shaw stepped out.

"We've had enough of this, and it's time to quit. The young man is perfectly inoffensive, and as you drove him out of the Bar it is hardly the thing to attack him here."

Becker was staring straight at his hammerless pistols, which he was holding up straight before him. He did not seem to hear the sharp, incisive order of the governor.

"Kill me!" he shouted; "but Pluggy 'll die a-tryin' ter git even!"

He dashed the useless weapons down and once more with his bare hands sprung at the dude, striking right and left as he came.

But he found Arlington Auburn at home. With nature's weapons he was never inclined to take a back seat; and this time he played for keeps. He just turned his head and Becker's left whistled by it. Then he threw up both fists, and there was a loud snap as Pluggy's right arm broke between them.

"And heah goes fawh your jaw," he hissed as he shot out his right, hard and straight, with the whole weight of his body following it. "You won't twubble me again fawh a month!"

A louder crash as the blow went home; and the toughest chief of the Bar fell as limp as a dishcloth.

"I don't, aw, shoot gentlemen, but, aw, the muscle is what I twavel on; and when I hit it goes wed hot."

"He teaches that sort of thing, back East," said Miss Fanny to the colonel, who had followed her to the porch. "Some call him the fighting dude—only, a fight out here means something else. I shouldn't wonder if he would go back to the Bar, now, and take Pluggy Becker's place. I don't know, after all, but what it is a more manly way of settling differences."

"Yes, but the pistol puts all men on an equality," said the colonel, somewhat aghast at the unorthodox suggestion.

"So does trained muscle—or did before shooting became one of the fine arts. I have spent some hours handling a revolver myself; but I can't say I prefer it—the fault of my early education, I suppose. Becker weighs fifty pounds the most, and has the dead strength of a mule. Why can't he use them, and let lead and steel alone?"

"Because it's not the fashion, my dear. Another Yankee Sullivan will have to arrive to rekindle the old enthusiasm—and I'm afraid he can't do it."

"Unless he settles in Boston," sighed Miss Fanny. "But that is hopeless, I am afraid; and just now I am more concerned to know what provision can be made for the night. Mr. Nye may be a conjuror, but I can't even then conceive of his stowing us all away in comfort. Mr. Hawkins and his friend have one little room to themselves. The little fellow is limping around, swearing he will shoot the first intruder, and I think he means it. Mr. Darelle and his daughter have another, the governor has pre-empted a third; and I'd like to know what is to become of us in particular, and the rest in general?"

"Well, there's the stage, you know. Always a chance to camp down in that. But can't you arrange with Miss Darelle? The old gentleman will probably, from a hint I have had, be over with Shaw playing draw, and I will be a looker-on, even if I don't get interested. They have some sort of a friendly controversy between them that they are going to settle to-night. After the session is over I see no reason why Darelle could not

bunk in with Shaw while I roll up on the floor, your brother make himself comfortable with the rest in the big room, and you share the couch with Miss Darelle. The rest of the gang—the Nyes, the prisoners, and the men from the Isabella don't count."

"Thank you," answered Fanny, curtly. "I would as soon share the couch of a tiger. For Arlington's sake—and the little rascal was ashamed to own me when he came to the Bar in at least the shadow of her company—for Arlington's sake I tried to warn her. Never accuse me of having good intentions again. I renounce them forever."

"I don't know what you'll do then unless you come in and play draw with the rest of us."

"Thank you. I'll consider the proposition. I might be in more unprofitable business if you all play fair. But, Colonel Boutelle, one question, if you please. Why was your mine called the Isabella? That the name of any friend of yours?"

"I have no friends—ahem! Though I am very willing to have them to tie to. And an Isabella I have never known, not even in my boyhood's days. The mine always did have that name, and I guess got it from some streak of sentiment in the man who made the first strike there."

"And who was that?"

"The name is lost in antiquity; and yet—it seems to me it was a man by the name of Carey. I have a clean title from the first recorded owners; but I have never troubled myself about shows as long as I had a firm grasp on the substance."

"Not that man who lies out there?"—pointing as she spoke.

"Well, scarcely. Though he chose to assume it I am not sure that his name was Carey at all."

"Quite a common kind of uncertainty in this country. Governor Shaw, for instance, who is so kindly looking after the shattered Becker. Who can tell what his name was before he left his own country, possibly for his country's good. By the way, have you ever met a gentleman named Edgar Otis? For reasons of my own I would like to make a few inquiries about him if I could run across a man of knowledge."

"Perhaps, but the name is not familiar. If you have no other questions I must tear myself away. If you feel like joining our little party we should be glad to see you, and will allow you to chip in on a special, moderate limit."

"Thanks. Perhaps you are aware I have ten thousand with me. I pull cards to make money; not to lose a little fortune. And yet, I don't know. Good-by, and take care that Eg. Shaw does not swamp you. Perhaps I shall see you later."

"Queer little woman, that," muttered Boutelle, as she sailed away.

"Honest and brave; handsome and not a bad heart. I fancy there is something of a mystery about her. She is no great friend to Eg. Shaw, let the world say what it will. He has tried to be her friend, or a little more, but in spite of their seeming to pull together I think she makes him keep his distance. If I was out of the woods with the Isabella, I don't know but what I would try my own chances. Oh, well, we'll see what turns up to-morrow, when we have looked the property over. From what Dick says about the new developments she will look better than ever. Wonder if I could hold on alone? Fifty thousand is mighty cheap."

Then he went down to talk to the men who had come up from the bridge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BIG GAME BEGINS.

COLONEL BOUTELLE had revealed to Miss Fanny the arrangements for the evening, without any hesitation. He had not been enlightened by Egbert Shaw as to the idiosyncrasies of their shaking old friend; and though he knew the latter had a large sum of money about him he had no idea that the play was likely to grow more than ordinarily deep.

There was no great anxiety shown by any one to get down to work. There was enough else in their thoughts to divert their minds, and the evening had rolled along pretty well toward positive night before the three met in the room secured by Shaw, the colonel entering last of all.

"I took your advice, governor; or your suggestion rather. Three or four more of the men that had shinned across the ropes, same way as the boss, arrived, and seemed a heap disgusted that the fun was over. For fear there should be a famine in the land I sent them back with the prisoners; and I guess they'll have a fresh supply of grub here by morning, and the latest news, from the bridge. Anyhow their room, just now, is worth more than their company. They could have camped out doors, as they will do anyhow; but as they get restless they develop a tendency to whoop; and if they decide to vary their monotony by hanging the road-agents I don't want to have them where there is a chance the ladies might see them kicking."

"You can hardly call it my suggestion to send the prisoners away to be hung—and hung they will be—sure," responded Shaw, a little moodily.

"However, we will, as you say, have a more comfortable night here. And I feel like it, I confess. The ride, and the wind, and—everything! I can hardly keep my eyes open now."

"Come, come!" piped the quavering treble of Sidney Darelle.

"You know you are not so sleepy as you look, and I expect to find you very wide awake before the night is over, or I'll have more than my revenge."

He stopped to cough a moment, and then went on:

"They say you can quit tobacco if you use more whisky; and since I have determined to play for millions—in the quartz of the fair Isabella—I don't—ough—feel half so inclined to cards. Are you well enough supplied with cash to make the game interesting? If not, we may as well defer the bout. I want to have one more trial to make sure—ough—about what I told you, and then I'll stop for good. I—I—don't believe—ough—I can afford it."

"Nonsense, man, you couldn't make a perceptible hole in your fortune if you played for a lifetime. It is only after a bad little streak that you feel a gentle pinch. The next break brings you even. And so far the luck has been really your way. I doubt if you are a dollar poorer than when you entered the Bar. At our last meeting you were on velvet, since you had captured the tiger to some purpose. Of course I am well enough heeled. If I run short of coin, I have plenty of collateral; but I don't think, from the looks of things, either of us will want to press the game very hard to-night. Lucky that we have cards and light to keep us from dying in this dismal old hole."

There was a slight inconsistency in the governor's talk; but his words varied with the change in his face and feelings.

As he threw out a pack of fresh cards there was a change in Darelle's face also, and Boutelle, who happened to be watching him, started with surprise, it grew so wolfish and eager. There was a cunning look, too, in the deep-set eyes, and the hand that grasped the cards trembled more perceptibly than usual.

If ever he had the gambling fever, the fit was on him now.

"If Mr. Becker had not behaved like a brute, we might have invited him in," he said, perhaps knowing and trying to conceal his eagerness.

"It seems lonesome to have but three in the game. Ough! There is that Mr. Woburn. As he risked his money with some judgment at faro perhaps if we asked him he would take a hand. What do you say, governor?"

"No, I thank you. It seems to be pretty certain that he is just what he seems; but he is Fairy Fan's brother, and that don't make him any better. Skill at cards seems to run in the family. And he has been doing the unexpected so frequently that I don't yearn to have him break out in a new place. He might take us all through the flume, a boiling."

And the governor shrugged his shoulders, and meant every word he said, though he would have been willing enough to undertake a private seance with the gentleman from Boston, if there had been no better game afoot.

"Sorry you don't like the lot," said Boutelle, looking up with a laugh.

"I happened to be chatting with Miss

Fan herself a bit ago, and invited her to join the sitting. She didn't exactly accept, and she didn't precisely decline. If she comes we can scarcely freeze her out."

"Good heavens, man! When she makes up her mind she won't be frozen. I'd sooner face a dozen card-sharps than interview that icy little bit of femininity over a deck. I have tried it once or twice and—but, pshaw, what's the use of wasting time. Mr. Darelle has the cards shuffled—cut and we'll see who is to have the deal. Talk is good; but after all, when you play cards you may as well give it your attention. There's a heap of money been lost by speculating when the work might have been going on. Ah! The gods are good. My deal. Now, to business."

The talk ceased and the sober, steady playing began with a ten-dollar ante all around.

Colonel Boutelle, who had become more of a business man and less of a spendthrift since the prospects of the Isabella had so wonderfully brightened would have been suited just as well with a smaller ante and more talk, though he made no particular effort to have it reduced, or to introduce a limit. At the same time his interests were such that if he could not win himself it was best for him that Darelle should not lose, and when he set out he rather thought he could act as a kind of balance-wheel in the game.

There was not much call in the outset, however, for him to exercise caution, as the cards ran provokingly slow, and he contented himself with watching the methods of the two players with whom chance had decided he should be so intimately related.

Luck was pretty evenly distributed.

The first hand Boutelle chipped on a pair; Darelle threw up his hand; Shaw came in; Boutelle drew three cards; the governor stood pat; the colonel raised; Shaw called, and threw his cards into the deck when Boutelle showed a pair of queens. In fact, he had a pair of tens.

"In no great haste to get rich," laughed Boutelle, as he drew in the pot.

"What sort of a hand do you stand on when it won't beat the brace of virgins? It strikes me a little draw might have helped it."

"Come, Boutelle, I can't see any way for you to pay for that information, so I don't see any call for you to ask questions. Perhaps my eyes are not as good as they might be—this is a devilish poor light—and I've no doubt the angel Gabriel himself sometimes mistakes the size of his hand."

"If he plays," said the colonel dryly, who had no particular convictions himself, but hated irreverence; and he drew the cards together with a look of injured innocence, as though the other had been attempting to lead him into some particularly wicked path.

After that, however, he made no irrelevant remarks, for some half-dozen hands the game going on in silence.

Then Darelle suddenly seemed to take more interest, and went blind a hundred dollars, the colonel giving him the chance while Shaw held the deck.

"I think my vein is coming, and you see, I work it in season and out of season—ough! I might as well have waited till I saw what I was betting on, but they say a blind must win, so I'll see whether it won't change the luck a little; so far there has not been enough out to risk cigars on."

Still, there was a little quaver in his voice that a sharp ear, watching for a pointer, could detect, and just the ghost of a smile stole around Egbert Shaw's hard-set lips.

He didn't care to hear Boutelle talk; but he was willing to listen to Darelle, if his tones gave him away.

"The old man grows anxious; and according to his system the time has about arrived to bet. I'll give him a chance to test that vein down to the bottom," he thought, as he coldly pushed two hundred dollars over toward the middle, a movement that was followed after a few moments' hesitation by the colonel. As a beginning, they were doing well, since Sidney Darelle instantly fluttered another two hundred down, thus leaving matters in *statu quo*.

"Straights beat two pair?" interjected the old gentleman, while the governor dealt.

"And royals four of a kind," added Boutelle.

Shaw nodded and picked up his cards, the rest following suit.

The result of the inspection was that all three went into the pot to capture quite a tidy little sum of money, Boutelle calling for two cards, Darelle three, while the governor contented himself by remarking that he would take one.

A gleam of pleasure lit up the colonel's face as he gathered up the pasteboards that fell at his hand. He was not altogether a stoic, and until he was thoroughly settled to business was liable to give himself away.

Darelle received his more calmly. Indeed, from the moment that Shaw began to run the cards his countenance took on a wooden cast, that gave no more expression than a white oak stump. He drew his three cards up one by one and arranged them in his hand, and then looked up expectantly at Shaw, as though he expected to tell by the back of the one card the size of the hands against him.

The thumb of the governor rested on the center of the card, but just as it began to slide forward there was a slight rap on the door, which almost instantly opened, and Fairy Fan glided into the room.

"I hope I don't disturb you, gentlemen. I said neither yea nor nay to the colonel's invitation, but afterward it kept bothering me more and more until I could stand it no longer. Deal me a hand, somebody, as soon as you can. I have ten thousand dollars here to win or lose, and while it lasts I promise you I mean to make the game very lively."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STRAIGHT FLUSH.

For ordinary noises without, the three men were prepared and would have taken no notice of them; but this intrusion was just then so unexpected that it doubtless gave all a start.

Boutelle, who sat with his back to the door, half rose in his chair, but was cool in an instant.

"Really, I am glad you thought better of what I took for a refusal. We thought some about the advisability of sending out for you, but decided you would come when you were ready. Take a seat. There's a bottle of choice cognac on that chest and a case of cigars, if you have occasion for either, and you can look on till this hand is played out. Then we will attend to your case. You couldn't persuade Miss Darelle to keep you company, I suppose?"

"What what, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Darelle, looking up hastily at having his daughter's name mentioned.

"Don't speak of it, if you don't want a scene. She has, ough, a prejudice against the royal game, and I was only too thankful when she announced that at last she was worn out, and would retire early. Don't mention her name or she may awaken."

The ludicrous dismay in his voice hardly indicated a proper frame of mind for proper playing, and Boutelle answered with some contrition:

"Pardon me, my dear Darelle, I didn't intend to unstring your nerves just at this stage of the game. It seems to me I am not in the mood for this to-night, and I've half a mind to draw out and devote my time to entertaining Miss—Miss Auburn I believe it is. The advent of your brother has given us a name that otherwise would have probably remained forever unknown."

The governor with his five cards held together in a little pack, rapped sharply on the table and recalled him to the serious business.

"Oh, yes, excuse me. I—I hold the ace."

"A thousand!" said Darelle, stringing out his money as he spoke, with more promptness than had been looked for.

The governor said nothing, but from the wallet at his elbow drew out five thousand, which he placed on the pile.

"It's going to size my pile before this hand is out if that's the way you begin," exclaimed the colonel. "I suppose you will give me a sight for my money when I can't go any further. You will have to drag me to the rack; but I declare I can't allow a hand like this to be ashamed of my nerve for lack of backing. There's the buckskin, and there's just six thousand in it."

"Very creditable in you, partner, and I

would not say another word if we were alone in the game. But Mr. Shaw may feel the same way, and we must give him—ough—a chance to express his sentiments."

Darelle's words were cooler than his manner, as, between the succession of rapid coughs that his excitement brought on, he piled up ten thousand.

"Eh? Money speaks for itself?"

"Certainly," said Shaw putting down another ten thousand.

"It was hardly necessary for Boutelle to ask his question. Of course he has an interest in the stakes to the extent of his money; and no more, unless Miss Fanny chooses to lend him enough to come in."

"On that hand?" queried Boutelle, flirting his cards open, and holding them toward her.

"Not a cent. I'll ante up with the rest of you if you'll deal me a hand, and then decide what it ought to be worth to me; but it's my own luck I back, or none at all."

"Then," said the colonel in a tone of resignation, "I shall wait until it is my time to show up. If I had known it was to be a tooth and nail affair I would have stopped out altogether."

"If it will stop your everlasting clatter I for one, would be willing that you should draw down your stakes and go court Fan in some other room. We act like a gang of boys playing seven-up for fun behind a barn. What do you do, Darelle? The more money you put down the more you have a chance to take up."

"Exactly, ough! Five thousand to make good and twenty thousand as an inducement to come up higher."

"Oh, dear," groaned the colonel quietly with an audible aside to Miss Fanny, who was leaning forward to watch the game.

"Who will own the Isabella this time next week? If the governor has his usual luck it will not be Darelle and I. I'll have to form a stock company yet, and put the shares on the market. By the time a few sharpers have got in and had a say-so for six months you know what they will leave for me?"

"Don't talk, but watch the game," whispered back Fanny, sharply.

"If the worst comes to the worst with you, and my affairs go right maybe I can buy an interest. I'm giving up the Quartz anyhow; sold out, lock, stock and barrel. Now, hush."

The governor held his cards by the ends with both hands the back of the lower card out, of course, while he stared a moment at Darelle.

Then he laid them carefully face down, drew out his pocket-book, from which he took a paper.

The back of this he indorsed with a stylographic pen:

"Pay to bearer,

"EGBERT SHAW."

He tossed this over to Boutelle.

"It was understood we were to use collateral. As you are to be Mr. Darelle's partner you can assure him that it is all right."

The face of the paper was a Wells-Fargo receipt for fifty thousand dollars.

"I will accept it as it stands for a half interest in the Isabella," responded the colonel, turning it over to look at the indorsement, and then placing it in the pool, as Fanny whispered in his ear:

"By the lord of luck, he was getting ready to bolt."

The governor said nothing; but turned inquiringly toward Darelle, carefully smoothing out the smile that seemed to be trying to break out around his lips.

There was a momentary but painful hesitation about the old gentleman. He rubbed his eyes with a hand that trembled more than usual, and his voice was almost a whine as he glanced appealingly at Boutelle.

"It's an awful lot of money, ough, but I ought to play my game, oughtn't I now? Shall I—"

"No, for heaven's sake, no!" exclaimed the rich clear voice of Leona, as she sprang into the room, her hand in her bosom.

"Where is your promise, Egbert Shaw, given to me, but this afternoon? Would you ruin him, soul and body? I will defend him against all the thieves, cut-throats and gamblers from here to Frisco. Lead him a step further if you dare!"

"You had better retire, Miss Darelle,"

the governor answered in his very silkenest tones, smoothing again out of his face the smile of triumph that more than once had struggled to rise there.

"You come too late. The game has reached such a stage that your interference, even if successful, can only cost him a fortune, while if let alone, he seems to stand a remarkably good chance of winning one. I don't play my cards for what they are worth, but only for all that is in them. Sidney Darelle, do you allow your daughter to dictate to you?"

"And this is all your word is worth?" she retorted, with cutting scorn, waving her hand around, and letting one shapely slender finger point at last at Darelle.

"This is the way you keep your sworn oath; this the value of the vows you made me this very day."

"Pardon me, but since then some things have happened, and I have heard others that would release me from any promise I might have made, express or implied. I was an unseen but interested witness of your friendly interview this evening—I hardly suppose you wish me to speak of its termination. Allow me to run my business affairs to suit myself; or must we both speak? If so you should know who will be the heaviest loser?"

He shot a malignant glance at her that she met for only an instant, then her nerve gave way. She saw that her secret was known, and sunk back with a low cry of dismay into the seat that Fairy Fan pushed toward her.

"Now, Mr. Darelle," the governor continued, "what are you doing? This all is disgustingly irregular; but between gentlemen whose hands have been on the board the whole time, it can be overlooked."

"What—ough! What was I going to do, Boutelle? Oh, dear, Leona, you have set me quite abroad. I—let me see: thirty thousand to come in. Yes—ough!"

A number of thousand dollar-notes he quaveringly counted out, and then began from a hitherto unopened pocket of his wallet to count out United States bonds.

"Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seven—no. I will stop there. Does that—ough—look as though I was the slave—ough—of a woman?"

He pushed them toward the rest of the notes, and with his cards lying on the table between his elbows, he rested his chin on his hands while he tried to look triumphantly into the face of the governor.

"Money talks," was the hard, terse answer.

Then Shaw drew out another Express receipt of one day later date than the other indorsed it as before, and passed it to Boutelle.

"Fifty thousand again," said the latter, bowing. He was almost as cold now as the governor, since he saw that the struggle was to the death; and he suspected that Shaw was near the end of his resources.

No one else said a word, while Darelle stared at the receipt; but the hushed breathing of all sounded painfully eager.

Then slowly Darelle began again his count, his fingers clinging to the bonds, and so quivering that it seemed as though he would tear them ere they fell.

"Call!" he said, in a hollow tone, that came near being a groan, and startled Boutelle, who, for the instant, felt a cold shiver of apprehension run from eyebrow to heel, lest the old gentleman had been making a magnificent bluff all through, and lost his wits at the last moment.

"A straight flush in diamonds with the king at the head," said the governor, stringing them out on the table.

"Good for me," bowed the colonel, throwing up his hand, in which nestled four little eights.

"Not good!" shouted Darelle.

"A royal flush in clubs, with the ace at the head, and there are the cards!" stringing them out and looking up at the governor.

For answer Shaw threw both hands forward, intending to grasp all in the pool and draw it toward him.

In a flash Sidney Darelle was transformed. From his shoulder out shot his right fist across the table, taking Shaw well upon the face and hurling him backward as if shot from a catapult.

"Here, Boutelle, watch that this thing is straight as a string!" the old gentleman shouted, "and you, Fanny, and Thompson, you've seen his hand and mine; now look

how the infernal thief was holding out. Take the deck-head, though, and count the cards. Up with it, quick, man, if you don't want him to plug you sure."

Then as Boutelle picked up the cards, Darelle turned the table up on side, and showed three cards sticking in the crack between the top and the rail, on the side where Shaw had sat.

Thompson, the quiet man of the stage, came forward, while a couple others peered in at the door.

"You are correct," said the quiet man. "I never had my eyes off of you, and I can swear you played your cards straight as a die."

"Hold there, or I'll—" began Shaw, staggering to his feet and as his senses came back to him whipping his hand back for his revolver, in a lightning effort to catch the drop.

"Go to kingdom glory—if you touch that hammer, by the Lord of Israel I'll blow you through and through! I'm Hair Trigger Tom, of Red Bend, here with the drop. You know me of old, Edgar Otis. I'm here to get even, and I've got you foul."

Cough, palsy, old age—all the wonderfully skillful disguise was gone, and in its place stood a young, handsome, powerful man, with steady nerves and glittering eyes, looking along the line of a pistol barrel that never wavered.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

KNITTING UP THE FRAYED EDGES.

THE sudden change in Mr. Darelle was a thunder-stroke to more than Egbert Shaw—or Edgar Otis, as his old partner had named him. Shaw, knowing now whose hand had him covered, did not attempt to move, but Miss Leona gave a shrill shriek of dismay. Then Mr. Thompson, who had eyes everywhere, caught her wrist.

"Please don't. Shooting wouldn't help you any, and might hurt Mr. Darelle. If you keep cool I think maybe you'll come out all right. You're dealing with a hard man, but one that's square to the chin. Just hold on till he loans you a quarter, will you?"

She thought better of her mad intention, yet crouched back, hot and quivering, like a tigress ready for a spring.

"I want my money that you have robbed me of," said the governor, firmly, after that momentary hesitation. "I seem to have fallen among thieves; but, Boutelle, I'll swear I always thought *you* were an honest man. Stand by me, won't you, and we'll hold our own yet."

"I'm sorry, Shaw, but I'm afraid the boot is on the other leg. I've counted the cards, and there's not a shadow of doubt but what you have been holding out, either on this hand or some other. It looks to me as though you had set up the deck, lost sight of the stack and put yourself in a hole. Perhaps you would say that yourself if you looked at Mr. Darelle's discard and my hand."

"The flames of perdition seize him! Why do you call him Darelle? He's a cut-throat and a thief, who has set up all this game to rob me!"

"Go easy, Mr. Otis. You are back on your old stamping-ground only under a new name, and are talking to an old pard that you robbed and tried to murder. You haven't and hadn't a thing of your own to be robbed of; and the end is not yet."

"You and your vile paramour be hanged! I'll—"

"Steady, there. No paramour is she of mine, but as badly sold as you are. She, too, thought I was a crazy weakling, who fancied he saw in her—with her trumped-up proofs, furnished with a batch of testimony by another adventuress—a long-lost daughter and the heiress to a million. And yet, for your sake she would have left me in a moment if she could only have carried a few of my thousands with her. Speak of her tenderly, she deserves it. And as she was an essential part of my scheme, I shall present her with twenty thousand dollars as some compensation, and send her on her way rejoicing. As you are down to bed-rock I don't see that you can do any better than go with her."

"With her—with a woman as bad as the

worst—with a cold-blooded murderess on whose hands the blood of her husband, slain this very day, has not dried. Thank you, no. But I'll have the pleasure of sending her to the rope; and you with her as an accomplice. I know—for I saw the deed, and then and there gave her up forever. Had it not been for that you never would have roped me into this cut-throat game."

"In other words, when you decided you could not take my millions through my daughter, you were satisfied to have a hack at them over the card-table. Nonsense, man. You are doing all this talk on the chance of seeing an opening; but when Hair Trigger Tom is around—even if, of late, he has been out of practice—you will find none. Now, Thompson, talk sense to him. You and your pards have been getting in some pretty fine work, and you may as well put him out of his misery."

"Yes, governor. I'm very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, but as you're a dangerous man I'll have to do it. The Cracker has split, wide open, and we've got a cord of evidence without him. I'll have to put on the bracelets. Colonel Longhand, hold out your wrists."

He made a swift effort to comply; but as each wrist was just behind the butt of a revolver the attempt was not quite according to card, and as his weaponed hands came around Hair Trigger Tom carelessly crooked his finger and the man went down.

"Don't look so blue, Miss Fanny," he said, lightly. "There's no harm done. I creased him to make him lie still while Detective Thompson puts on the gyves."

"Yet for the sake of my sister, his wife, I would sooner that he had a different ending."

"Your sister!"

"Yes, my half-sister, though he knows not of the relationship to me. I got her out of his clutches, when he was murdering her by inches! Afterward I found it to my interest to keep an eye on him, since he furnished the capital to run the Quartz, while I was waiting for a chance to save something of his fortune for Isabella."

"You know that she would have been my wife had he not ruined me and deceived her?"

"Yes. She has spoken of you. Perhaps some day in the future—"

"She has no future—on earth, at least. She died two weeks ago. I have kept my eyes on her since I found her. I will speak to you of her again. Now, I must finish my work here."

They had spoken in low tones, so that their conversation had not been overheard. He turned away, to Leona.

"Though your reasons were selfish I must say you have tried to defend me, tooth and nail. If you had not been in sober earnest I doubt if I could have brought Edgar Otis to the pitch of having his whole fortune available for the turning of the cards. You thought I was an insane old fool, looking for a daughter; and you were willing to pose as the missing heiress—for a consideration. You may be disappointed, but you shall not go unrewarded. I doubt if you could have made twenty thousand more easily. Here it is. Good-by. It would hardly be advisable for a young and handsome young lady like yourself to be seen in company with Hair Trigger Tom. The world could not exactly understand the relationship. You can see that such persons as you have their uses, and as it's scarcely worth while to give you any advice looking to moral regeneration, I can only say, pick your flint and try again. The next time you may find a father that will hold."

She looked as though she could murder him without remorse; but as he said nothing about Sam Loftus, and the crisp notes were in her hand, she thought it best not to prolong the conversation—she thought it best to depart before some one else did. Without a word she stuffed the notes in her bosom and took her departure. As Carey had said, it was something of a disappointment, but the pay was very good.

"Now, Boutelle, it is understood, I suppose, that our bargain holds. There is no use for me to go down there before we close, since I know the place like a book, and with what you have told me, understand the situation exactly. You have only found what I

knew was there, and between us we'll make Rome howl."

The frayed ends of the story are easy to knit together now, and the reader scarcely cares for any extended explanation.

Egbert Shaw was the redoubtable Colonel Longhand, and the false Tom Carey a worthy lieutenant who had assumed the name under orders from the colonel, and had carried it for a year or more, probably to help relieve him from any likelihood of trouble in regard to the old affair, in which, as he had believed, his partner was killed by his cut-throats, in order to place the mine in his possession.

Detective Thompson, with his ally, Uncle Daniel, who both at times assumed the disguise of Tommy Tough, looked well to it that the now fallen idol of Bad Man's Bar received the punishment he deserved. They had been really playing into the hands of the true Carey, who, at the last moment took Thompson more or less into his confidence, else his admirable acting would have deceived them both. An adept in disguise, Hair Trigger Tom once assumed the character of Tommy Tough, and several times that of Wellington Woburn, engaging in the pleasing occupation of bringing Pluggy Becker to grief—though the first and last racket was between Becker and the simon-pure dude.

That young man, alas! could take care of his head; but not his heart. When morning dawned it was discovered that he and Leona had taken their departure, presumably together. Sam Loftus, who did not die, made no revelations; and, as no one else could say anything, the statements of the governor were taken for malice or raving, and the two, unfollowed, winged their way to parts unknown.

Hawkins and his partner never met them again, and doubtless would make no sign if they did.

And Fairy Fan no longer reigns Queen of the Quartz—but she has an interest in the Isabella, since Colonel Boutelle's liking for the nervy little woman developed into loving, and she had not said, nay. The mine was not put on the stock market, since the two partners worked it for all it was worth, and found it a veritable bonanza. Should you ever get as far as Bad Man's Bar it will be worth your while to go over to the mine. The colonel will guarantee that the bridge is always in order.

Uncle Daniel is still a peripatetic fiddler, working blindly under the orders of Mr. Thompson; and his inside occupation is still unknown to the world at large. His share in the bringing of Eg. Shaw to grief was unsuspected at the Bar, though he occasionally spins a lively yarn about the sharp that the road agents followed to the Bar for a flat, and how he turned out to be a little better than the best, and in sober verity—all wool, and a yard wide.

THE END.

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